TRIBALISM IN INDIA

Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya

SHOUT
SHARE
IT

Tribes in India form about seven per cent of our total population—which is perhaps the largest population for any single country whose major population is non-tribal.

Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, one of the foremost names on the Indian social and cultural scene. attempts to interpret and depict the varied aspects of Indian tribal life—origins, traditional dress, social customs, symbolism of their rites and ceremonies, etc—to the lay public.

She drives home the point that even though there are some similarities of beliefs and life-style between tribals and non-tribals, they have not blurred the strong sense of social distinction that each tribal community feels. Nor have they (interaction of tribals and non-tribals) eroded their distinct tribal features yet. The author's conclusions are based on her own personal experience with the tribals amongst whom she moved and identified herself.

TRIBALISM IN INDIA

TRIBALISM IN INDIA

KAMALADEVI CHATTOPADHYAY

Distributed in the U.S.A., CANADA and MEXICO
by
Humanities Press
Atlantic Highlands, N.J.

VIKAS PUBLISHING HOUSE PVT LTD
New Delhi Bombay Bangalore Calcutta Kanpur

VIKAS PUBLISHING HOUSE PVT LTD
5 Ansari Road, New Delhi 110002
Savoy Chambers, 5 Wallace Street, Bombay, 400001
10 First Main Road, Gandhi Nagar, Bangalore 560009
8/1-B Chowringhee Lane, Calcutta 700016
80 Canning Road, Kanpur 208004

COPYRIGHT © KAMALADEVI CHATTOPADHYAY, 1978

ISBN 0 7069 0652 7

1V02C3101

Printed at Ashoka Printers, Sri Nagar Colony, Delhi-110052

To
Verrier Elwin
who first revealed to
me the Tribal World.

Preface

This book is an attempt to interpret and depict tribal life to the lay public. It has a purely human and social approach unlike the usual anthropological one. The attempt to describe the core and essence of the tribal life is based on my own personal studies among the tribals when I visited and moved amongst them to help develop their crafts. It has naturally been amplified with the studies of others.

As I came to know the tribals, I began to realize that there is basically not so much difference between them and us. A most fundamental tie is the universal concept of godhead and divinity and the belief that there is life in everything. Undoubtedly, this is the beginning of *Advaita*, the realization that an all-pervasive life runs like a single thread through the universe. The deifying and personalizing of every object, so basic a faith with the tribals, is carried on to this day.

We still continue to worship nature like the tribals worship trees, stones, rivers, mountains, the sky, the earth, the planets. The idea behind it is the same, of propitiating and pleasing them to win their favour, succour and blessings. We share most of the superstitions, whether it be the day of the week or the hour on which we start on a journey, perform ceremonials, the influence of the cardinal points on our movements, the colours we put on, above all, the causes of diseases or misfortunes, and the remedies to meet them. We still continue to observe the seasonal festivals, as also several of the rites connected with them, though we have become too self-conscious to display the same exuberance or abandon as the tribals do. And the special care of and fuss made over a pregnant woman and the different ceremonials, still observed even in the most sophisticated households constitute a direct heritage from the ancients.

The tribals indulge in the pastime of decorating their own bodies and every thing around them. The beauty becomes so desirable, compelling and satisfying that the high intellect of the Aryan equates beauty with god. It becomes one of the highest attributes of godhead.

In line with this tradition of the tribal is their insistence on excellence in work. No matter how humble the object, it is exquisitely wrought, the makers taking real pride in their performance and achievement.

Unfortunately, we are fast losing this pride in work and a sense of reward in the excellence put into the job itself, for now the commercial element has come in to distort natural elements. An awareness of an undeclared kinship with these communities, who still preserve and cherish some of the elements and values that have faded out of our lives, should reorient our policy towards the process of rapid detribalisation. It should see that the tested and tried values are sought to be saved so that some of the ancient wisdom is retrieved and preserved.

New Delhi KAMALADEVI CHATTOPADHYAY

Contents

Chapter One TRIBALISM IN INDIA 1

Chapter Two TRIBALISM IN INDIA

1. THE BHILS OF GUJARAT AND RAJASTHAN 55
2. THE NAGAS OF NAGALAND 80
3. THE AGARIAS OF MADHYA PRADESH 95
4. ARUNACHAL PRADESH 107
5. THE GADDIES OF HIMACHAL PRADESH 124
6. THE SAVARAS OF ORISSA 130
7. THE KURICHYAS OF KERALA 138
8. THE KHASIS OF MEGHALAYA 142
9. THE SANSIS OF PUNJAB 160
10. THE MAHADEV KOLIS OF MAHARASHTRA 167
11. THE SANTHALS OF WEST BENGAL AND BIHAR 178
12. THE CHENCHUS OF ANDHRA PRADESH 195
13. THE TODAS OF TAMIL NADU 204
14. THE LEPCHAS OF SIKKIM 213
15. THE LAKHERS OF MIZORAM 224
16. THE GONDS OF MADHYA PRADESH 241
17. THE KORACHAS OF KARNATAKA 265
18. THE KHARIAS OF BIHAR AND ORISSA 270
19. THE LODHAS OF WEST BENGAL 285

Index 295

Chapter One

Tribalism in India

The definition of "tribe" as it has emerged from attempts of scholars on tribal life is—a social group usually with a definite area, dialect, cultural homogeneity, and unifying social organization. It can include several sub-groups, such as clans or sibs. A tribe ordinarily has an ancestor and a patron deity. The families or groups composing the larger tribal units are linked through "blood ties," as the term is commonly used, and through religious, social, and socio-economic functions.

India has perhaps the highest tribal population for any single country whose major population is non-tribal. Tribes in India form about seven per cent of our total population. These figures, however, do not give any picture of the size or importance of each tribe in a particular region. For instance, although there is only one tribe in the Laccadives, it actually comprises 97 per cent of the total population.

The racial classification, as made by anthropologists, allots them to four main groups: Proto-Austroloid, Mongloid, Negrito, and Nordic. I shall not attempt to distribute the various tribes, as that is not the purpose of this book. I wish to only describe the social and cultural elements which govern these communities, for what such a study reveals is that the basic affinities are far more impressive and convincing than the less important dissimilarities. The variations in content are more in the nature of being complementary.

An intriguing fact to note in this is that several tribes prefer to call themselves by the simple epithet *man*. Here are a few examples. The *Mikirs* use the term *Arleng*, meaning man; the *Garos* call themselves *Mande; Boro* say the *Kacharias;* the *Kakayens* changed theirs to *Singpho*, again meaning man. This was probably because they felt the names by which the people in the plains referred to them were derogatory. They chose the simple but significant and dignified nomenclature—*man*.

Environment

The tribals of India may be described as nomadic herdsmen and agriculturists. Hunting is mostly a side occupation now, well-prized but hardly an exclusive means of livelihood; and getting rarer. They are often nomadic shepherds and cultivators, accustomed to shifting cultivation. Their herds of cattle and sheep move with them. The tendency now is to change over to settled cultivation, especially as the administration encourages them and provides them facilities. The tribals generally live on the outskirts of forests in which spots can be cleared by burning for *jhum* cultivation. This also provides them scope for game-hunting and bird-catching. As Dr Elwin aptly puts it, "for centuries the environment has been the real ruler of the tribals."

As urbanization grew rapidly in the country, the tribals who did not get into the mainstream of change, naturally got isolated within narrow confines, preserving to some extent their ancient patterns of life. This was further accentuated by the British who raised, hard walls around the tribals, so that the natural commingling was arrested.

Even though some of their places of habitation are considered very unhealthy by accepted standards, the people themselves seem to have become well-acclimatized and are not prepared to face environs other than their own. Each group has thus, on the whole, kept pretty much to itself, retaining its special physical characteristics, customs, habits, conventions, clothes, crafts, etc. Each man and his family fend for themselves, building their own houses, weaving their own cloth, making the various articles and requirements for domestic use.

The tribals have naturally a wide variety of architecture, for their houses have gradually evolved over the years to meet certain conditions of the climate and daily life. It is a common saying that the style of a building varies according to the length of hair which a

tribe keeps. One tribe may have houses as long rectangles while others may have them square; but they show a preference for circles. They seem the happiest sitting round a fire in a circle. In fact, the hearth in a house is so important that special names are given to its four quarters. There are strict rules as to who may sit where and the kind of work which may be done there.

Integration

The basic fact of their culture is that it is an integrated all-pervading element. It is the living organism that acts like the life-blood which feeds and nourishes, pumping vigour into the arteries which cannot stand any arbitrary amputation. By implication, therefore, it stands in contrast to the sophisticated patterns of our concepts of culture, which is exclusive and the privilege of a few, and which ultimately makes one seek channels of escapism from harsh realities.

Members of the tribal society do not consciously feel they *belong* to it. They accept it and its contours as one accepts the landscape in which one grows up, and which one naturally assimilates—not as an external framework into which one has to fit. There is a throb in communal energy, a sense of strength arising out of belonging to a great family. Tribal life has no isolated spots, no gaps that yawn, everything is related. How deep and vital this link is can be realized from the fact that neurosis and psychosis are almost non-existent amongst them. Their way of life provides a built-in balance which acts as a prophylactic, or when necessary, also as a therapy.

They seem to be able to see into the very heart of nature, converse with it in majestic silence, and learn from its ancient wisdom. Nature's exuberance, gaiety, and colour have left an indelible mark on their imagination with all its subtleties and its varied phenomena. This is evident from the pride they take in their fine physique, in their love of personal adornment, decoration of the objects of daily use, the picturesqueness of paintings on the walls, elaborate wood-work and patterns which they weave into their fabrics.

They apply themselves in a serious and meticulous manner to every task, some of which may seem trivial or even childish to our jaded minds. Their actions sometimes are quite child-like. Even a make-believe situation to them becomes real, as, for instance, giving liquor to a tree to revive it from exhaustion, when heavy chopping has been done for ceremonial purposes, or hanging old clothes on a tree to

attract the kind attention of *Chithra*, the deity connected with old clothes, so that he may replace these with new ones.

Out of their intimacy with the flaura and fauna, they have built up a world of their own which is both fanciful and highly poetic. They make up their own theories on the origins of some of the smaller creatures. To them, scorpions do not have a sex life. "Who would want to be with a scorpion," they ask very seriously. For them, when crabs' claws, fall off, scorpions are born. The butterfly is born in a flower, for the male settles on a flower attracted by the appearance and leaves its seed on it; then the female also sits on that flower and lays her eggs, and out flies the butterfly. The peacock drops its seed when it dances in joy, the peahen eats it and has babies. This is indeed sheer poetry.

They also formulate various romantic beliefs. The *Murias* attribute the cry of the crane "gudur, gudur" to jealousy. It is the female calling out to its mate to keep him beside herself, and to prevent him from straying over to another female. She also makes him sit on her eggs to keep him aware of their progeny and his ties to them.

The *Murias* have also woven an equally charming link between the cry of the Indian night jar "thukrus, thukrus" and the shuttle of their loom. They say if the weaver can guess which tree the bird is perched, the thread will break. So the weaver goes through the excitement of guessing, calling out names of all trees one by one. When the bird stops its cry, it means the guess is correct and the thread then gets broken.

Legends and stories gather around everything that is intimately connected with their life, however trivial the objects or events may seem to us. There are lovely little tales about the sago palms wherever they abound. A group of boys and girls came down to earth from the house of *Bhagwan* (supreme god) to bathe and dance. While bathing, they had put aside their cowrie ornaments which they could not find later. In their fury, they cursed the cowries, "Now turn into sago palms and we will then be able to always live amidst you and never lose you again." The sago palm is greatly valued and well-protected.

One may say that not only their historical record is preserved through these oral narratives but also their entire culture. Like all epics, the story tells us of the deeds or misdeeds of outstanding personalities and heroes, with a vivid description of the landscape in which their ancestors lived, their houses, food, markets and goods, the dress they wore, the ceremonials performed. Indeed, each story

relates to the very core of their culture. That is why these narratives are recited or sung on important occasions, so that the past becomes relevant to the present and merges with it. This has also given them a great sense of history as a continuing process, helped them to develop extraordinary retentive powers of memory as well as rich diction.

Myth and Ritual

Nothing in life, no phenomenon in nature are left to speculation or guesswork. No matter how mysterious something may seem to us, for them nothing is a mystery. Each has a clear explanation, neatly documented and labelled and put away in that inexhaustible storehouse of their prodigious memory, to be unravelled on auspicious occasions. The stories which the tribal tells are myths, not fairy tales, and here is the difference. "Myth is primitive ethnology expressed in poetic form," said Vernier Elwin. "Myth makes everything contemporary." It is the central dynamo of life and the link which binds him to the secrets of nature. In other words, myth allows him to come to terms with nature's varied and bewildering phenomena. The tribals never tried to either dominate or outwit natural forces, but they learnt to live with many of their harsh forms.

Myth is an experience which establishes man's kinship with everything around him. It reinforces his faith in himself explaining simply the rationale behind whys and wherefores by clearing the doubts and question-marks posed before him.

Myths also give substance to old customs and beliefs which otherwise get worn out and become dead-wood. Thus are valuable lessons of experience and sound fundamental values kept alive in the current of the mainstream. Elwin defined it aptly when he said they make every-thing contemporary, for they give vitality to customs, institutions and obligations. In the myths are explained all the dos and donts about food, dress and even events such as births and deaths. They can be described as pictures that pass over the memory walls of a tribal.

There is a close link between myth and rituals, for the latter mostly grew out of the former. Myths also provide themes for dances, an indispensible factor in tribal life, and aptly termed a "floating repository."

The tribals believe that there is life in everything. This is a deeply embedded faith that has been guiding them, long before the evolution of our own similarly conceived ideas. Everything is holy, for

each is a spirit, to be propitiated with homage and gifts. Nor do they believe that the dead really leave them. They continue their life's journey on the other side, and, therefore, have to be provided with all their daily needs. They continue to live, and are to be remembered and given special offerings.

To really understand the culture of a people it is quite essential to know their faiths, social philosophy, and pattern of organization also. Culture is the core, the quintessence of tribal life—from the simple daily chores to the most significant events such as births, marriages, deaths. This term has, however, to be understood in its widest sense with imagination and sympathy. Our ability to do that will be determined by our capacity to relate them to the human background, which, in this case, is the entire community. No theological codes are called for, and our familiar measuring rods are not adequate.

As all activities are permeated by religion and the supernatural, there is no room for demarcating the various spheres. All tribal regulations are directed towards strengthening this integrated totality. In fact, it is this which gives stability and harmony to their lives. To disturb or sunder it at even a single point would mean breaking up the whole. We would, therefore, mislead ourselves if we felt we could grasp their material culture by the observation of any single facet, since all expressions form but a part of their entire make-up.

In tribal thinking there is no such thing as an accident. Suffering is a retribution, the cause of which must be sought. They believe in immortality, so death is the cutting short of the span of life, hence it calls for finding out its cause. Sorrow is mixed with fear, as its cause may be malignant. Thus, death is due either to a taboo being broken or because the person has been called by Supreme God in which all tribals believe.

Because of this all-pervading religion, every function seems to become ceremonial. Everything has a guardian deity to bestow favour, bless and protect, and equally to frown, curse, and destroy. So every function carries with it a corresponding rite, whether it be worship or propitiation of the concerned spirits. The subjective and the objective faith and performance are inextricably linked. The different rites are but the subjective emotions translated into certain set forms.

Some tribal beliefs are elusive for us. Free rapport too is not always easy. Tribals are wary, and naturally reticent where sacred matters are concerned, all the more so with non-believers, lest the

deities take offence. One needs to approach this complex aspect with a mind completely free of any preconceived notions and prejudices. To begin with, one must get rid of the erroneous idea that their minds are simple. When viewed deeper, their thought-forms appear involved, and almost bewildering at times. Everything has a long history behind it, and without understanding this nothing becomes truly intelligible. It does not seem possible for them to do anything without their approaching the powers, since all their life's events are traceable to them. It is, therefore, fatal to be out of harmony with that order.

As all tribals believe that every object has life and a spirit which is benevolent or malevolent, and to which daily occurrences can be traced, each has to be worshipped or in some way propitiated. They have great reverence for powers of nature, sky, air, earth, sun. While sitting down, many tribals are careful to see that the sun is on their right, otherwise it would mean disrespect to it. Today, the pure animists may be fewer than before, having borrowed some Hindu gods, and also because of conversions to Christianity. Nevertheless, it seems that this has really not dislodged their own ancestral beliefs which are very deeply ingrained in their being.

The daily routine continues to be ruled by the same denizens as from time immemorial. One may note here this strange phenomenon of a simple society that is yet impregnated with a rich religious complex. In a way, the very physical environment which they live in, serves to generate and perpetuate these images. Living on rugged mountains and in dark forests certainly feeds their imagination with fantasies. For most of their spirits are but parts of nature, and its manifestations represent also the essentials of life such as sunshine, rain, and food crops.

They have evolved multifarious methods of dealing with various types of supernatural powers. Tribals, it may be noted, do not suffer from frustrations arising from doubt and disbelief. They are a wholly committed people. The simplest of them have evolved one important figure, above all others, one supreme being called *Mahaprabhu*, *Bhagwan*, etc. He is, however, a very human god, one of themselves. No worship or propitiation rites are offered to him. He is attributed with all the failings, worries, and anguish of man. Even his creation is defective, and he has also to learn by trial and error like all of us. All his creatures seem to be created as the need arises. Another fact is that he does not make something that already exists. He makes a snake out of a thread from round his neck, and a peacock out of a

piece from his loin-cloth. All that he needs is there.

Here is a quaint story of a complicated creation. He took a small crab stuck in an irregular piece of bark for the tail, collected five snakes' fangs and put four in its belly and one in its tail. Then he put it under a stone and said to it, "If anyone sits here, bite him so that it really hurts, for five snakes' poison is in you."

He is neither omnipotent nor omniscient; so to meet every situation he has to enlist the help of some creature. His continued indebtedness to the bear and caterpillar for the grain that he once borrowed, is unbelieveable for a godhead. Nevertheless, he commands love and respect, for he is full of kindliness, and never fails to come to the rescue of those in need. Moreover, they owe every thing to him, for it was he who taught them to till the land, to provide water for fish, trap birds, make beer, sing and dance. Above all, he discovered the various elements, and taught his people to secure their goodwill and help.

Graphic descriptions are also given of things he attends to, such as creating earthworms to keep the soil porous, and the spider so that man may learn to weave and make fishing nets. He also wanted to make man more abstemious and less greedy, so he sent the bullock to ask men to eat only once a day; but the bull being a bit dull, forgot and told them to eat twice a day!

Of special interest are the tribals who practise Buddhism. They are to be found in Arunachal and parts of Himachal, particularly Kinnaur, and Lahaul and Spiti. The centre of inspiration for Mahayana Buddhism is the monastery in Tawang on the Tibetan border. The Buddhist community consists of a number of small groups amidst the non-Buddhists. While Mahayana Buddhism went to Tibet from India, originally, it came back to India via Tibet. The journey of Hinayana was even longer, for it went from India to Sri Lanka, then to Burma from where it came back to India.

What difference has Buddhism made to the tribes practising it and how can they be marked apart from the non-Buddhists? These questions had long intrigued me. I cannot say I have found all the answers. Religion for the tribes is not something which they "profess," but rather something which is deeply embedded within their being. A point to note is that while a sizeable number of tribals have been converted to Christianity in some regions, especially in the north-east, no Buddhist has ever lent himself to conversion. Buddhism seems to give a self-containment and an anchor which provide stability. They

make no animal sacrifices and observe restrictions in diet. They are not supposed to eat beef, pork, mutton, chicken, and meat of wild animals. One is not quite sure how strictly this is observed. The Lamas, however, eat fish and venison.

One may say what these tribes practise is not pure Mahayana but a mixture, retaining their old faith with its own rituals and observances. Mahayana, instead of attempting to replace the old faith, came to terms with it; but the Buddhist symbols are prominently erected, worshipped and maintained. There is *mane*, a low long wall with small shelves cut into it, on which are ranged stone tablets with the sacred formula, *Om Mani Padme Hum* (jewel in the lotus), and, on some, lotus flowers are etched. The walls are raised as an act of piety, especially in memory of a dead person, and also to ward off evil spirits. Then there is the *gompa*, a monastery, to house the image of the Buddha as well as to store religious books. *Gompa* means a lonely place for withdrawal and meditation. Each has several prayer flags planted around it, and as they fly aloft they bring relief and comfort to the eyes of the approaching traveller watching from afar. The monastery seems to have started as a simple rectangular building, but grew up at several levels, sometimes into heavy gaily ornamented structures with roofs painted with dragons, discs, the wheel of law, conch shells umbrella, a love-knot, a standard, fishes, and in fact, all the eight auspicious signs. In the monasteries, the books are as important as the images, for Buddhists have a natural passion for books. Those leaving their home and country try to carry as many books as possible with them.

The *chorten* is another focal point. It means a receptacle of worship. It is based undoubtedly on the Indian stupa, originally contrived to hold the Buddha relics, and evolved into a symbol of achieving salvation. The relics can consist of bone fragments or ashes of saints, deposited inside a vase; or the edifice would be filled with *tsha*, which literally means a manuscript, but here, it is made of clay stamped with a bronze or copper mould bearing sacred inscriptions. I understand the *tsha* itself may become a relic, for a saint's ashes can be mixed with clay. A *chorten* can be a repository of anything, *thankas* books, old sacred articles unusable any longer for worship, but which cannot be destroyed. The various floors in a *chorten* symbolize the ascending of the spirit from the simple to the complex. As with most religious structures, it too began from modest beginnings, grown later into a complex structure directed by elaborate guidelines.

The significance of each section is meaningful and calls for a study by itself. The sacred area marked off by the temple precincts stands for the universe covering the four major and four minor continents of the Buddhist cosmography, each coloured differently. One sees *chortens* near monasteries, outside towns and along pathways—the former to enable devotees to acquire merit by the ritual of circum-ambulation, the latter to serve as landmarks for the travellers to see from afar.

The Hinayana Buddhists use the Indian term *stupa* for the *chorten*. Buddhist tribals usually have chapels in their houses. True, the common people do not grasp the complexities of their religion, but they probably experience a sense of awe. It has certainly given them a gentleness, an orderliness and discipline.

Tributes in kind to religious institutions is obligatory. But every Mahayana family is also expected to contribute a son, usually the second one, to the lamasery. With the Hinayana, this is optional and the door to revert to the ordinary life is always open, and this right is exercised probably more frequently by the Hinayana community.

The Mahayana *lamas* still continue to follow the old *bikkhu* custom of begging for their keep, and do their studies with the senior *lamas* in monasteries. There is, however, a move from the government to offer the *lamas* opportunities to study in the common modern schools run by the education boards. It is quite a sight to see the young ochre-clad lamas beside the secular students in the classes.

The male lamasery has a female counterpart, a nunnery. The nuns are known as anis, and they can joint he institution from the twelve to twenty-five years. Normally, they join at a very early age. They live a highly disciplined and austere life too.

The Buddhist communities have a system of maintaining a Lama to take care of their religious and spiritual needs. They also initiate the young into the basic tenets of Buddhism. The teachings are oral, but still seem to keep the teacher and the pupils fairly close.

Kinship

Because of closely knit family and community life of the tribals, kinship plays a very important role in their life.

A detailed study reveals tremendous elaboration of a tie which in most other communities is fast crumbling. On all important occasions,

each of the various members of the family has a definite individual role to play, whether it be birth, marriage, death, or other observances. These seem fixed, and are not relevant to the economic or legal status of the person. Even where hereditary rights are denied to women, their right to take part in the social or religious rights has never been questioned or denied. In fact, their functions continue to be strictly respected. Thus, a mother, a sister, an aunt, who may have no legal claims on the wealth, get their due recognition, a formal or ceremonial acceptance on the appropriate occasion. For kinship is a fundamental bond which is kept intact through distribution of certain specific functions to enable intimate participation in worship, celebration, and mourning. This is also largely encouraged by the need for a united strength against outside attacks from human or animal raids. There is a certain identity between these observances and the codified guidelines indicated in compilations like the *Grihyasutras*, which are perhaps over 3,000 years old.

Similarly, because of the emphasis on the collective rather than the individual responsibility, even in case of a crime, the responsibility is placed on the clan or the village—a public disgrace to be atoned for by all. Where the convicted is unable to pay the fine, the clansmen club together lest they too get penalized. The tribal councils usually fix the amounts of compensation according to the means and status of the accused, taking mitigating factors also into account. More than the fine, it is the humiliation involved which is more important, for the tribals believe that their status in life is also reflected in the life after death. The honour or disgrace received here will be repeated there. Thus, in the case of a rich man who is made to pay a large fine and gets impoverished, he believes he will remain a poor man in the next life too. This becomes the biggest deterrent.

It is a common practice to offer a sacrifice on this occasion to bring the parties in conflict together in a common feast to generate friendliness. An interesting side effect of this is the assumption that if an article is stolen, which may apply to quantities of grain too, the spirit within it quits in disgust and has to be cajoled to return. Therefore, the man who steals is obliged to pay an additional penalty in the shape of an animal for sacrifice. In the case of murder, the sacrifice is made to the spirit of the dead man, or else some misfortune, like disease, may befall the family of the murderer. This system has definite advantages inasmuch as it eliminates imprisonment, which is by no means wholly satisfactory. Here justice is speedy, on the spot,

and meted out by the community leaders themselves. Two important gains are that the offender is not made an outcast, and his services are still available to the community and the village. The sense of kinship is further strengthened by a common response to a power, supernatural or supersensory. Community or village worship also cements this solidarity.

Apart from blood and marriage kinship, the tribals have devised what may be termed a ceremonial and sacred bond of kinship, called *Mahaprasad* engagement, because of the partaking together of sacrificial food by the contracting parties. This forms a significant feature of tribal life in India. They say, one may leave one's brother but not one's kin. It is a covenant between two individuals, who may even belong to two different tribes, pledging to stand by each other for better or for worse. They must not refer to each other by name, as a mark of respect. It is certainly a highly developed sentiment and build-up of friendship.

There is also an elaborate ceremony to mark the sealing of this kinship to which guests are invited. A priest officiates. The intending parties sit facing each other, while spread before them are the usual leaf plates with mango leaves, flowers, etc. The priest asks—"Oh *mahaprabhu*, these two have come together in friendship, let this be never broken. Let their affection be equal, let there be no deceit. If this ever breaks, then let my own eyes be broken." Then each puts a coin on the leaf before him and sits down. The medicine man then throws a cloth over them and passes some water in his cupped hands round their heads, marks their forehead with rice, splits the mango leaves, folds them into little bundles, and ties one to each of their wrists. Both rise, each putting a flower behind the ear of the other, after which they exchange new clothes and help each other to put them on. They also exchange gifts and liquor, letting a few drops fall to the ground in honour of gods and the dead. Boys and girls also form flower-friendships, perhaps in a less serious vein.

Totemism

As each tribe is accepted as having descended from a common ancestor, those from the same sib-sect cannot marry. The tribe gets divided into clans and sub-clans, and among many, each has a totem. Anything connected with the totem is taboo to that particular sib. Those who come under the totem must refrain from killing or injur-

ing, or even using the object identified with the totem. Taboo extends to objects which even resemble the totem. Though it may seem far-fetched, it is known that some people whose totem is the tiger extend the taboo to the squirrel, since it is also striped. To our unfamiliar minds, many of these links are puzzling and bewildering. When a totem is injured or scarred, mourning for a period is observed by those who come under that totem.

When families go to attend festivals, they carry with them their emblems, made of wood, brass, and even earth with vermillion marks on them. They are respected in every village as emblems of the ancestors.

The *Marabi* sect is said to be derived from Maruka Garh, the fort of the dead, and, therefore, members of this sect do not eat the flesh of any animal which dies a natural death. Members of the *Kewachi* sect will not pluck a flower of that name. The *Jal* sect will not eat fish caught in a net *(jal)*. The *Munjinis* will not even sit under a tree of that name.

Here are a few explanations of how the totems came to some of the tribals. A tribal, while he slept under a *kujur* tree, found that the plant had entwined round his body and protected him. So in gratitude he took it for his totem. A tribal was about to catch a tortoise when the latter cried, "I am your caste fellow." Thereafter, it became a totem.

Totemism being a world-wide phenomenon, attempts have been made to trace its origin. Normally, it seems that totems are objects that groups of people lived with, such as animals, plants, fish, etc. Obviously, emotions and intimate associations built up around these inanimate objects have been personalized and rendered very human. Such tales mean to them even more than epics mean to us. They are sometimes narrated at important rites to remind and impress the participants with the importance and significance of the ceremony. The tales reveal a most lively imagination, particularly stories of their "origin," of even the smallest objects, such as the earthworm. To early man this must have been the biggest mystery he had to find an answer to. So he tried to unravel it in these picturesque form of stories, naive in their child-like simplicity, yet almost bewildering in their variety and complexity. Also personalized is their sublimation of the human frailities to the godhead, such as tears to *Ankhwanu Mata*, mother of flowing eyes; headaches to *Zampadi Mata*, goddess of headache, and so on.

Festivals

Festivals are a very important component of tribal life. They have a rich comprehensive nature that combines intense worship, dance, revelry, and feasting with the most dramatic scenes of solemnity.

They generate revelry by dancing, singing, pantomimes, and games to enliven the lot of the villager. When the event has passed, it remains as a signpost in the community's flow of life. They build up precious memories to be cherished. Mothers recall the birth of their children by their proximity to any of the festivals. On the religious and social side, the festivals bind the members of the community together as well as relate them to their tribal spirits and ancestors. The offerings and rituals shared by all keep alive their sense of one-ness and belonging. They also serve to stimulate vitality and give meaning to their songs and games.

Certain features are common to all festivals. On festival days, work is taboo. There is a great bustle and much ado with the preparations, such as collecting grain, husking and cleaning rice, brewing beer, collecting wine. New skirts are stitched, dance costumes re-done. There is a routine worship of demi-gods and spirits as indicated by the calendar. Offerings are made to bless the mortar, the hearth, the threshold, and the cattle-shed. The dead are honoured too. A special factor is the determined effort made to provide wide and hearty participation by the youth in the festivals of all villages within a certain radius. For this reason, the calendar observing some festivals is appropriately arranged in a cycle. They also become occasions for the re-union of broken intimacies, for forging new ties, for courtship, for finding mates, testing romances, and for a host of other emotional and aesthetic experiences. There are special ceremonies to bring estranged people together, and to end feuds, which are most touching and significant. What is even more striking is the very natural and subtle manner in which this is done. The *Kols* of Madhya Pradesh celebrate this during a marriage, when parched paddy and millet are cooked both in the bride and the bridegroom's house, then mixed together in one pot, and a circle made around the marriage-fire. This marks the coming together of all estranged people and smoothening of ill-feelings. At *Sawara* festivals, fresh stalks of grain are distributed as a mark of ending feuds.

The festivals largely revolve around agricultural operations, determined by seasons, natural phenomena and important events of life

like births, marriages, and deaths. Without them, the stark severity of conditions, under which tribals live and struggle for existence, would make their life deadly and miserable. Through festivities and the accompanying rites a cheerful atmosphere is created. The costumes worn on these occasions fill them with a sense of pride, the allure and pathos of songs stir their sensitivities, and out of their dance comes a release.

The cathartic effect of rhythm in restoring equilibrium through song, dance, and drumming is universally testified by experience. Objects like masks also become instruments for ostracizing terrors of the unknown. Many may not know or may think it queer that psychiatrists prescribe for some patients the study of tribal customs. Long ago, art expressions may have performed this very function, which today may seem absurd to many of us, since man has moved away from the primeval moorings which rested on self-expression. With the tribals, cultural forms are still communal. In sophisticated groups, the emphasis shifts from a common vision or values of the whole to a single person.

Divination

Occasions, when the spirit of ancestors speaks through oracles and unravel mysteries are also treated as ceremonial festivals. These are oath-taking ceremonies and ordeals, startling and grim. The commonest rite is divination, a practice as old as man himself, and as assiduously pursued as the struggle for survival. It attempts to find out the why and wherefore of events, and acquire the ability to ward off dangers. In truth, almost every tribal activity is preceded by a divination rite so as to know beforehand whether a venture will be fruitful, whether certain days will prove auspicious or whether a hunt or marriage will be a success.

There are a variety of methods of divination. The two most common are sacrifice of an animal or bird to watch its death struggle for omens, for the entrails of the dead creatures are supposed to contain answers to questions posed, and are intelligible to the diviner. The second is oracular, common in shamanistic cults, where the priest goes into a trance to become a vehicle of the spirit that speaks through him. These ceremonies can be very long and complicated to find out the cause and cure for an illness. A priest with an assistant performs these rites, which start after a few preliminaries.

The priest takes a handful of rice without clenching the hand and puts it into the winnowing fan, covers it with a gourd, and waves it around the sick man. This is to send the disease-causing spirit into the ground. Next, he starts rubbing the rice around the fan in circles while he chants the following in a low monotonous tone, "O *Mai*, come and sit on my tongue, declare in the *supa* (fan) who is troubling us. You are the master of knowledge, temple of knowledge." The rhythm, the hushed tense atmosphere all create quite an eerie feeling.

Another rather unusual rite is *Ban-Bati*. An earthen lamp in a net is held high up by the priest as he chants. If the flame waves towards the priest, the answer is in the affirmative. If it merely swings to and fro, the answer is negative. If it gets extinguished, a witch is causing trouble.

There are also preliminary tests. One is *Bahari Kari*. The priest holds long and wide straws in his hand pointing to the ground, uttering invocations. Then the related question is asked. The answer is obtained by measuring the straws before and after the prayers. If they have grown longer, the answer is favourable, otherwise negative.

In line with this kind of reasoning is their belief that weather could be controlled through rites. One experiences these incidents while travelling through the tribal belt. One hears of villagers blowing a storm away, almost sounding like driving a herd of cattle, sometimes by shooting at the weather violently. One even hears of professionals whose job is to control weather, especially drive away storms and other atmospheric calamities through magic. These men like water-diviners are employed by villages especially for this purpose. The rite is performed as follows. The man stands on one leg holding in his hand a hail-stone and a straw, and recites, "Rajaram has climbed on a stone, above him is an arrow. *Ari ari jini, pari pari bhum!* Who drives the hail away? The guru drives it away, and I'm his pupil. By my order go away, go to the Renjawad, Benjawad jungle! Go to *Ghaili Kachar*, the jungle where no man can go, go search for birds and eat them. I drive you away from here, *ari ari jini, pari pari bhum!*"

Though others who had seen the rite being performed, told me of it, I had no occasion to see it myself. Once, when I was stranded in a tribal village for quite sometime owing to incessant rains, I requested the villagers to ask their priest to pray for fair weather so that I could travel. They frowned and looked shocked, then said with a strain of pity, if not exactly contempt, "We are blessed with rain

because our priest has been chanting special prayers and performing ceremonies for it."

Sacrifices

The tribals spend a good deal of their time on religious observances. They also very wisely combine them with feasting and a kind of exalted excitement, together with the satisfaction of fortifying themselves against the supernatural powers, they have some lighter moments too. For some of their rituals are long and arduous, which the feasting mellows. Except animals for sacrifice, the ingredients used at worship are simple, such as flowers, leaves, twigs, grass, coal-dust, rice, flour, vermillion powder, earthen pots, bamboo fans, baskets, tamarind, and rice—indeed, all a part of their daily life.

A small mud altar, or for important occasions, a booth of palm leaves, suffices for worship. The ground is covered with a wide variety of attractive and complex patterns drawn by rice powder. Where an animal sacrifice is involved, it must be made to eat a few grains of rice or millet before the event. The priest who officiates indulges in a number of stylized gestures as part of the rites. After the ceremony, all the items used are taken out of the village and destroyed; while returning home after discharging his function, no one should look back.

A tribal priest is accepted as a genuinely devout and selfless servant of the community, imbued with unquestioning faith in the supernatural, and fulfilling his duties without any expectation of material reward. Such confidence in the priest's integrity is bound to have an impact on the community. The priest has to live a chaste and a highly disciplined life. In fact, it is commonly believed that a priest will lose his spiritual powers if he is selfish and departs from a virtuous life. Continence in the use of tobacco, toddy, liquor, meat, sex life, etc., is observed for a specific period before a pupil can embark on training for priesthood, or learn the secrets of magic. He has to observe several donts, like in order to cure a snake-bite, he must never cross a stream without wading through, and without drinking its water. If he comes across a swarm of black ants, he has to break the line to go through, never jump over it. He must not eat vegetables that look like a snake.

To the tribal mind, the moral behaviour of men does not seem to be related to religious beliefs. The latter are centered in and woven

around certain taboos, the observance of which is believed to be demanded from men, but there is no aura around virtue, as in non-tribal societies. Even worship in their case is different. Theirs is a philosophy not churned out through an intellectual exercise, but in a most direct and natural manner to meet the primeval needs of man.

Yet they have a sense of ethics in the sense of discipline, respect for and obedience to elders. They learn to respect rules and social norms which make for family and tribal stability. These are subtly inculcated in the young from the very early days.

Though tribals do not seem aware of our rules of personal hygiene, something called ceremonial purity forms an important element in their life. One has to keep oneself away from certain contacts that may taint, and also observe for the same purpose certain taboos, austerities, fasts, diet, etc.

Among some, clothes worn at certain festive dances have to be fresh from manufacturers, containing unwashed starch for purposes of ceremonial purity. They are, therefore, carefully put away in sealed trunks for use next year. There they are kept unwashed for years. The presiding deity would be displeased if these clothes were washed, which would taint their purity.

Sex

Sex for them is natural, part of nature. Sexual diction runs through their entire world, and every object has a mate and a love life. The sun and moon are like husband and wife. A tree which bears fruit is a woman, which does not is a man. Branches rubbing against one another are lovers caressing. There is no inhibition, no sense of guilt or shame associated with it. They are not unduly conscious of their appearance, and accept the various organs as we do limbs, something which some modern people yearn for, as manifested in nude colonies and the like. While they enjoy sex life with no inhibitions, there is no preoccupation with it. There is no moralising of sex, nor the upholding of celibacy as a higher way of life, or a way of life at all. Abstinence is enjoined just like fasting, as a natural discipline at certain special occasions. Here is a line from a *Karma* song which expresses their attitude:

> "In some houses there is food, other houses money, but in every home there is youth and desire."

The *Baigas* of Madhya Pradesh actually believe that one who dies without tasting the joys of love, becomes a *rakshasa* (demon), an angry burning ghost covered with black hair, frustrated and always on the look out for a virgin.

Marriage

Marriage among the tribals is naturally a community event and carries public sanction. It is not a mere joining together of two individuals. Although romance and elopment are not unknown, marriage, in fact, is not just the flowering of a romance, but rather the end of the free and easy youthful life.

Among the tribals, marriage is symbolic—the union of the members of two families, an exchange or sharing in a common act, drinking from the same pot shared by all, rice-cake eaten jointly by women of both the families. The symbols used are vermillion powder for blood; the green mango for life; while rice, nuts, dates, etc., are symbols of fertility. Functions such as thatching the grass, pushing the yoke, turning the grinding stone and many similar functional rites are all important parts of the ceremony to mark the beginning of a householder and the founding of a family, and thus, cover the basic facts and functions of life.

Tribals consider pairing essential to fecundity. They do not relish the idea of even inanimate objects remaining single. They regard those unwed as socially ineffective, who become useless unless ceremonially wed. The sun, moon, trees, various creepers are wed; when out fishing, they marry the nets and receptacles for fish, just as spears, bows and arrows are wed. Every year when the *sal* flowers appear, the earth is married to the sun. The priest personates for the sun, and his wife for the earth. In fact, all marriages can take place only after this celestial marriage.

The Dormitory

A pivotal social institution among many tribes is the dormitory which is said to have started as a guard-house, but is very different now, carrying different nomenclatures amongst different groups—the *ghoutul*, *morung*, *moshup*, *clere*, *loop-pong*, *ngaptek*, *byango*, and several other names. Normally, there are separate dormitories for boys and girls, and each has a different name. For instance, the former is

known among some as *hangseuki*, and the latter *lenseuki*. A well known exception to this is the *Murid ghoutul* which is for both the sexes. It has been described in great detail, with unusual understanding, by Dr Elwin. It is very difficult to really get to know a dormitory for no non-tribal has unrestricted access to one. In addition, I was restricted by my sex, as women are not allowed near a boy's dormitory, and these predominate.

The dormitory occupies a central place in the settlement, and is expected to command an unrestricted view not only of the landscape but also of the various approaches to it. It can be an open hall with a fire in the centre, the inmates sleeping diagonally around it. Some have compartments of rough-hewn loose-fitting plauks with each section of the village having its own fireplace and separate entrance. Each of them has its own shelf for keeping the belongings, and sometimes over the fireplace hangs a tray for depositing trophies.

Normally, the dormitory is empty during the day. Among a few tribes, one dormitory may also be used for the aged and infirm during the day, but a separate fireplace is allotted to them. The village council also meets here. The girls follow the same routine. Even where there are separate dormitories for them, they go to the boy's for dances, especially at festival time, and boys, in turn, are allowed to make friendly visits to girls' dormitory. Thus sprout romances and more permanent ties.

The disappearance of the dormitories is unfortunate for many reasons. Until the current education now being introduced takes on some features of what the dormitory provided, a big void will be created. It will result in the decay of arts and crafts, the most enriching element in life. This leads to in the absence of recreational pursuits, for it would be a long time before modern-style parties and entertainments can be introduced. Above all, it is leading to a decline in general discipline among the youth, an increase especially in sexual promiscuity, according to recent studies on tribal life. The dormitory exercises were a quiet but firm discipline. Dr Elwin sums up his evaluation of the dormitory by saying, "The dormitory in fact is the guardian of communal discipline." Hence when you ban it, you only create a sense of guilt in a clean conscience.

Dialogues

The tribals, like all ancient people, are reticent of embarking straight

away on the business for which they may have gone to some one. The proper and genteel thing to do is to go meandering into lengthy and purposeless indulgence in futile preliminaries, starting with a lengthy formal preamble on each other's health and well-being. Such frivolous talk is a part of two parties negotiating a marriage union.

For instance, the opening remark would run something like this. "We have milk, you have the milk pail. Let them be joined." If the bride's party is agreeable, it will answer thus: "Yes, we have the tamarind and you have the mango." Such parrying will go on for sometime before the bride's party finally says, "If the village elders agree, let there be a marriage."

At times, the dialogues swell out into a prolonged scene. The girl's party fires the first shot as the boy's party enters the house. "Who are you and what are you doing here?" they ask. Pat comes the reply, "We are hunters who chase our prey in deep jungles. Today, after a long chase, the deer we hit ran off, and has taken shelter here." The other vehemently denies the charge "We followed the dripping blood-trail. Look at the stains at your door where the deer entered. Make it over to us."

The other party continues to deny, "There is no wounded deer here—you are mistaken. We have only a deer that we have been rearing since it was a fawn." Then there follows a lot of argument until finally the girl's party asks for the age and colour of this deer they are after. The boy's party says, "It seemed full-grown and dappled. We did not get too good a view of it. Would you be able to pick it out of a number of them put together?" they challenge. The boy's party replies with a sigh, "Yes, we should certainly be able to spot this deer again."

Then, at last, the girl's people concede, "Then it must be our deer that you shot and we cannot but make it over to you. But, remember, we took a lot of trouble bringing it up. Its mother was rich in milk, and unless you have numerous fields and a large jungle it won't be happy." Whereupon the boy's people give a solemn assurance, "We have jungles and pasture lands, and we don't allow any hunters. So it will be better off than now." To this, the girl's people seem to grudgingly concede, "Since it belongs to you we cannot say anything. But, before we hand it over, you should pay us back what we had to spend on it." Quick comes the retort, "As we shot it with our own arrow, it obviously belongs to us. Anyway, we don't wish to be unpleasant, and, therefore, will compensate you for the expenses you

incurred. How much did you have to spend?" With this the real business starts, and the deal is struck.

Here is another sample. When the boy's party arrives, the girl's party's first query is, "Who are you strangers who visit us in the dark?" The boy's party replies, "We are only some poor travellers who have nowhere to go. We are tired and hungry. We would rest a while. We have little rice but no vegetable to go with it. We hear you have some marrow. We come to request you to spare one to us." On this, the girl's party expresses shock, "What nonsense! Marrow in this house of our ancestors in which we have lived for years! There has never been any marrow in it. We fear you may be thieves who have come to rob us, go away." The boy's party tries to calm them in conciliatory terms, "You should not speak so rudely with anger to tired and hungry travellers like us visiting you. No, we are not thieves, and we ask you most humbly to give us what we want. You have it because we saw them on your roof. We have our eye on a particular one, and we are determined to get it." But the girl's people persist in denying, "Very sorry, you are making a mistake. We have only a little curry and we can give you some." Still, the boy's party rejects it and continues to insist on the marrow.

The girl's party finally concedes, "Since you are so set on it we agree. We did sow a few marrow seeds and the plants have come up, and grown marrows of various sizes. Which is your choice?" The boy's party thereupon says, "The one in the corner of the roof, and can be seen from outside. It is round and without blemish, and unusually good." The girl's party answers, "We have not seen all our marrows, but there is a large one which would make an excellent curry." But the boy's people don't seem to relish it. They say, "That is not the one. We want the half-sized one." Here the girl's party protests that they can't part with it. "We are keeping it for chutney. Moreover, in trying to pick it, the entire stalk would be disturbed." Whereupon the boy's party interrupts, "Chutney does not matter. We assure you we will pick it with great care and not damage the other marrows. So let us go and get it." Now the girl's party gives in and agrees, but makes a last bid, "But we wish to explain that we nursed it for long, spending a lot of money, time, and labour. For this, a special gardener had to be employed. Moreover, it had to be protected from animals. And as it grew taller, we had to train it to climb up with the help of a stick. You must, however, realize that after putting ourselves to so much trouble, we cannot just give it

away for nothing." The boy's party quickly agrees, and says, "We realize all that, and we don't ask it for nothing. We are prepared to pay a good price for it."

Here is another sample, a simpler and shorter one, but equally quaint. The boy's party starts the dialogue by saying,"Friends, we hear one of our lost cows has come to your cowshed." The girl's party admits of the presence of a cow and asks, "Is it black, red, grey, or white? Here are the cows." The boy's party replies "That grey one over there is the one missing for a long time. We don't think we can pay you anything for keeping it so long. But we mean to take it away now." The girl's party concedes, "As it is your property, we cannot keep it, though we shall be sorry to lose it. But we wish to know how you came to lose it while you were caring for it." The boy's party narrates what transpired, "As the sun was rising, the parrots were eating in the *cheetka* trees, and twelve other girls with freshly washed hands and feet were coming from the spring in new clothes carrying fresh water on their heads. We exchanged some pleasantries with them. Then we met a royal youth who was bringing his horse, elephant, *dholi*, and *palki*, and the place filled with the sound of drums, and the road choked with dust. But we managed to reach here safely, without the thorns pricking us or the lizard crossing our path or any jackal howling. Just as we reached here, we saw a girl with a pot of water enter your house." Whereupon the girl's party exclaims, "We are happy to hear you say this. You have come on a truly auspicious day. Good luck to you." Then the real dialogue starts. Such dialogues are indulged in on other occasions too. Sometimes, after marriage, when the bride's people go over to the bridegroom's to bring her to her parents on a short visit, the talk can go on like this. The groom's people ask quite casually, "Where do you come from? Where are you going?" Nonchalantly the reply comes, "We have come to look for our strayed cattle. A herd had come over to our end from this side. A calf of ours joined the herd when it was coming away in this direction." "Look out for your calf then," says the groom's party. "Ah, here she is," adds the bride's party. "Well, if she is your calf, you may take her home," concludes the groom's party, and hands her over.

Sermons and advice rendered at a marriage are also most illuminating. Among the Maria Gonds of Bastar, the girl's father addresses the boy's party, "Have you come willingly for this flower? Will you wear or cherish it? It is fresh and tender, and will not bear rough

handling. Know how witless women are? If she is a poor housekeeper, bear with her. If she cooks badly, pardon her. If she speaks to other men, do not take it amiss." The Chakmas in the hill tracts of Bengal say, "Take her, I give her to you. But she is not acquainted with her household duties. If you find the rice burnt or anything wrong when you come back from *jhum*, then teach her; do not take her life. If you do, I shall demand the price of blood at your hands."

The Uraons of Bihar say, "When the bull is killed for meat, girl, you must insist on having the flesh, only flesh, nothing else. The boy will have the bones, nothing but bones. Then again, when he is on a hunting expedition, slips in a ditch, laming his leg or losing the use of his fingers, never say he has become a wreck. And listen boy, if your girl, going to pick leaves from the *keener* tree, falls from a branch breaking an arm or a leg, you must never say she has become useless. Never tell her she has lost the use of her hands." A farewell oration by the bride's father when the couple is departing is very moving— "Today, the most important thing to remember is that the girl whom we are now sending away for ever is like an arrow. When an arrow hits a living thing, it can never be got out before it has killed. In a similar way, our daughter is going into your heart, keep her there always. The arrow, which is made of iron, takes life, whereas the girl gives life. Only at death will she come out from your heart, until then, she will stay in you." Then he addresses the girl, "The man whom you longed to strike is hit. Farewell. We are leaving you. Cleave to him. Eat and drink with him. Be happy."

Symbols

The bow and arrow are important symbols. At marriages, they are consecrated by the application of oil and turmeric, and are worshipped on ceremonial occasions. They are also symbols of prestige and self-respect. The arrow is, in fact, one of the most widely used marriage symbols amongst the tribals. At the marriage of the Gonds of Madhya Pradesh, a tiny image of a deer is made with grass, and placed behind the ear of the birde. The bridegroom then throws a toy arrow at it, made of grass or thin bamboo. Among some, like the Koltas, an image of a monkey or deer is made of powdered rice, and the bridegroom is required to shoot an arrow at it. The image is then brought back, cooked, and eaten. Among the Kawars of the Chhattisgarh Hills, when the couple come to the house after the

marriage, the boy shoots arrows at straw images of deer over his wife's shoulder, and after each shot, she puts a little sugar in his mouth.

Amongst other tribes, several other playful acts are popular. Amongst the Birhors of Chottanagpur, the birde carries a pot, a basket of clay balls and sugar, and the boy carries a bow or arrow and the branch of a mango tree as they go towards the bride's house. As they approach it, the girl puts her load down, and runs off towards her father's house. The boy, dropping his bow and arrow, runs after her. After catching her, he strikes her on her buttocks with the mango branch, and gets her back to their original path. Here, he shoots off an arrow in the direction of his house, and when it falls, she gives him sugar and hands him back his arrow, and washes his mouth. He repeats this five times as they approach the house. While entering the house, they take turns at throwing clay-balls at each other.

The arrow also figures in the Munda marriage. The day after the wedding, young girls and boys enter the nuptial chamber and bring out the blushing bride and the bashful groom, and all proceed to a stream or tank to bathe. After this, they split into two groups under the leadership of the bride and bridegroom to throw clay-balls at each other's group. The bridegroom conceals the water vessels in the stream for the bride to find, and she, in turn, does the same. Then the bride fills the pitcher with water, places it on her head, supporting it with her raised arm. The groom standing behind her lightly rests his hands on her shoulder, and through the little space shoots off an arrow into the path ahead. Then she moves towards the arrow, still holding the pitcher, lifts the arrow up with her feet, and gracefully offers it to him with an obeisance.

To those watching these enactments, they seem like set pantomimes symbolizing complex things like the bridegroom's duty as a husband, as a hunter, and as a protector. It is also supposed to suggest the sexual aspect of marriage, when the arrow becomes identified with the male. For instance, amongst the Savaras of Orissa, even a dummy marriage is performed of a girl to an arrow, and she assumes widowhood after she throws the same into the river. Only then the real marriage takes place. This is where fidelity to the boy is apprehended through this alliance.

In a marriage farewell address, the arrow is used to signify many concepts—as a power for the boy to build on, as an image of wife's

duties to the spouse, and finally, as a sexual image to symbolize the physical meaning of marriage. The deer also becomes a symbol of woman, as an object of pursuit.

Apart from the ritualistic, there are other homely but intimate objects that are of special significance in tribal life. One of them is the mortar. Beginning with the betrothal and ending with the acceptance of the bride in the groom's family, for all their important rites a fixed location has to be selected, and the mortar is the centre. In agricultural families, the mortar has a fixed place in the front portion of the hut, hence, its significant role on important occasions.

A common object, but precious beyond its utility, is the comb. Round it has been woven an aura of sentiment, romance, friendship, even intimacy. Combs for exchange are lovingly prepared, ornamented with such carving as would suitably serve the purpose, or embellish the person for whom it is meant. Many a romance is built around the exchange of combs, or hearts broken when they are refused or rejected.

Another similar common object of warm sentiment and social import is tobacco. Soliciting a little tobacco is more than asking for a smoke. It is a gesture of emotional intimacy. In fact, the popular tribal saying is, "The comb is for friendship, tobacco for generosity."

Women

An important feature of tribal life is the crucial role of women in it. Their tremendous physical staminah as to be seen to be believed, for many of them are small in stature and light in body, and yet, they act even as guards. They rush into fierce scuffles with men. Old women can pin down young people by their arms. They are like the Amazons, cast in a different mould.

The impression one carries of women, when one visits their area, is that they are labour machines, but if one spends a little time there, some other images also emerge. The care bestowed on a woman in her first pregnancy is touching. In fact, constant attention and tender care of the woman are obligatory on her relatives and friends alike. Running for months, rituals are observed and hymns sung for the protection of the child. There are songs also, to describe the state of her mind and psyche for each month. In the first month she is still pure, so the intention is to keep her relaxed. The second month she

is stimulated. In the third month her unusual cravings are sought to be satisfied. The fourth month is one of surprises, for there are feeding ceremonies for which special dishes are prepared. In the fifth month her mind is sought to be stirred with curiosities. In the sixth month she is slowly made aware of her condition in regard to her child. In the seventh month she is encouraged to speculate on the expected child. In the eight month she is to dwell on the coming child. And in the last month she is helped to prepare herself for the grand event. The delivery is watched over with great care. If the labour is hard or prolonged, visible efforts are made to lower tension in the air. Not only absolute silence is observed, bundles are untied, knots loosened, lids opened, doors unlocked—in short, every mark of release of anything under pressure is made.

The expectant mother's frame of mind is poignantly illustrated in the following tribal lyrics—

Moon of the ninth month cast its shadow,
How weary is the life within,
Where it sees its dark prison,
It struggles to be free,
And make its camp on earth.

Songs are sung as the woman goes through the great crisis of her life, to give appropriate expression to her anxiety and suspense, describing the waves of pain which roll over her. A special song is sung as the baby arrives.

I would hear a son,
Outside the house sounds a drum,
Inside cries the girl,
Worry not my loved, bud of the sun-flower,
Shall be her name.

Poetry and Song

The tribals have evolved the most fantastic imagery in vocabulary, which is natural, as their culture is largely oral. The Bhils have a sky-world filled with the following deities who control elements and the weather. *Kalowaro* (black wind) is the king of rain; *Kali-Badli* (black cloud) is his spouse. Then there are *Bari Megh* (twelve rains); *Gayan*

Ghothe (thunder house); *Thothi Vijal* (lamp lightning); and *Kali Vijal* (black lightning).

Tribal poetry is primarily lyrical, while the prose is narrative. Here is a lyrical poem from Himachal:

Yinglong and Lewong
They loved each other.
Loving they lay together,
Red as the leaf of the onhen tree.
Flamed love and desire on the paths to the village,
The two lit fires,
Skywards, upwards curling,
The smoke of the fire united,
And mingled never to part.

Some of the best examples of prose are the fascinating tales of creation. Equally so are tales of animals and birds, which tell about some of their astonishing modes of living and habits.

Their speech is interspersed with very vivid and picturesque phrases, such as the girl's body is as tender as fresh leaves; the bun of her hair is like a bulbul's nest; the thunder-cloud is described as the palm-leaf umbrella of the sky, crying out, "ding, ding," the hearth is a woman with three breasts. The cloud is described as ugly, it is called a mouse-mouth man, a hoe-tooth man, or coconut-head man.

When a boy's party goes to the girl's to ask for her hand in marriage, they are asked what their mission is, whereupon the boy's party replies, "A flower has blossomed in your garden, and its scent has come to our nostrils." The earth and sky are lovers; the rainbow is the ladder to climb to heaven.

Tribal songs are strong in emotion, impulsive, and one may even say improvident. They are true to nature and graphically define man's emotional reactions to the nature around. Limitations in finding expression for intense feeling through rhythmic vocabulary are ingeniously sought to be overcome through repetitions of the same idea or feeling, or by piling up synonyms and expletives. Even through heavy verbiage, halting phrases, or misty images, there does emerge startling songs of loveliness, at times, resulting in sheer poetry. Here is a Gond folk song:

To me this little village is as dear as the moon

And from the great city it has dragged me away.
In all the world a village is the place for happiness,
In evey house are ploughs and bullocks, and everyone goes farming.
When villagers are working in fields,
It looks like a festival.
After the ploughing, fields are thick with mud, but women dance as they sow rice,
Friends play, throwing mud at one another,
Some are smoking, some chewing pan, some who are idle sit gaping, while others sing.
In all the world, a village is the place for happiness.

Styles of song also vary according to the occasion for which they are composed. Two elements common to all songs are the rhythm, and the fixed interval. They differ from ours in some ways. For instance, the alternatives of rhythms unfamiliar to us are found in their songs as also complex rhythms that cannot be reduced to our measures at all. The other important element is the fixed intervals which may be transposed from one point of tone series to another, and which are recognized as equivalent. Sometimes, the intervals may increase as the emotions rise to a higher pitch.

As in all poetry and song, in tribal songs, too, love has a dominant place. Love is the primal passion, delineated in words, tender and moving, and often full of pathos.

Tribal songs are also matchless in their direct and vivid imagery. Unwritten verses are part of their total make-up like their myths, strands in their faith, which sustain, renew, and inspire them from generation to generation, and which have kept alive the centuries-old tradition. Economic values change fast, but the roots of their human emotions are knitted into their daily duties, in chores as well as rituals. Symbolism is the core of oral verse. The young girl maturing is most naturally described as a red flower. There is a quaint Gond riddle: What is a black seed grown in a blossoming field? An unwritten song.

Though verses may be composed in couplet from, they are really never loosely recited, for they are conditioned by the occasion which are related to, and which provide their content.

The sophistication of their love songs leaves one breathless. Those who have familiarized themselves with these declare them to be worthy of inclusion in the poetic traditions of the world. The verses

are subtle and tender, simple and direct, and sophisticatcd in their own way.

Dance

Dance is a very pervasive element in tribal life. It is closely interwoven in the very fibre of every being. There is "dancing" on every conceivable occasion. The dances, however, vary according to the occasion. Every village has, in fact, a dance floor specially maintained for it. In dance, they probably find the highest expression of their sense of order, rhythm, and delight. It also provides them the occasion to deck themselves in their fineries. These dances have their magical, sexual, and social significance. They are marked with almost a military precision and a poetic fluidity of patterns at the same time. Some dances are for men alone, some for women, while others are mixed.

Dance is not only a delightful exercise but also a display of grace and vigour, a pleasing partnership between the sexes to an ordered ryhthm. It has a ritual purpose, too, to serve as an offering to the gods, to make them happy. The tribals also dance in sheer delight with abandon, with no ritualistic purpose.

Here the relationship between word, song, and dance becomes most intimate. Powerful emotions flow out in body movements. Also, emotional speech gets released in rhythmic movement, for there is inter-relationship between body movements and articulation. Therefore, there is a likelihood that rhythmic body movement releases rhythmic articulation. Little tunes may have had their origin in body movements. On the other hand, excitement engendered by song may lead to movements that are related to the rhythm of the song. In other words, a dance may be conditioned by the song. So the two forms of expression are mutually determined. Moreover, among the tribes, emotions find vent in rhythmic activities. Hence, there are dances in which a number of dancers repeat the same movements. Symbolic movements are frequently used not only with song but also with speech, accentuating the relationship between language and movement. Many of the gestures are culturally patterned and the meaning of a song is often brought out more vividly by significant movements.

Some of the dances also depict the movement of birds, while some imitate animals with heavier, fiercer delineations. They range

between the tiny cricket, the bulky mithan, and the fearful bison, the crawling tortoise to the fleet-footed deer. Dance, obviously the voice and feet moving spontaneously under a strong emotion, has taken on definite forms directed towards a specific end and purpose. This also includes pantomimic representations of such incidents in their own lives as excited feelings. In time, they have come to acquire magical significance, for it is believed that personation and enactment with intense feelings bring about actual events. For instance, the rain dance is said to be followed by rain through the law of sympathy. Similarly, they are also expected to bring prosperity, health, and general well-being, because they lead to the stimulation of benevolent forces.

Music and dance are indigenous, and even the elders participate in it. Take the Kadars of Kerala, a tribe just emerging from the food-gathering stage, which has not only developed well-formed diverse dance movements but even an orchestra. The orchestra for the Kadar dance is simple, consisting of one or two drums and a pipe that produces the usual high-pitched and vibrant tone, which is held at one level as long as required, and offers a sharp contrast to the deep rhythm of the drums with their changing variations. If there is a second pipe, it adds modulation. A high-pitched flute is then included to complete the orchestra.

At times, the boys and girls dance together, sometimes in small groups of four. There are two main dances. One is a simple one-step pace, accompanied by a slight bending of knees, which puts one in mind of a slow rumba. The second dance consists of the big stride forward of the right foot, each time coinciding with the beat of the drum, followed by two shorter paces of the left foot, coinciding with the two lesser beats of the drum which are separated by short intervals. In this, the left foot is first placed parallel to the right foot after the latter's long stride, and the second pace of the left foot then brings it into an outward slanting angle to the right foot, all accompanied by short, pushing movements of the shoulders and the loosely hanging arms. The clapping of hands is accompanied by a forward bending of the upper part of the body, thus lowering the hands to the height of the dancer's knees and below, whilst clasping them behind the back. This makes each group of dancers a picture of vibrating rhythmic movement, expressing the ecstasy of the group in unison.

A wonderful harmony of the movement is delineated in the entire

group dance and in the coordination of different parts of each dancer. There is also a sense of elasticity, as the movements quicken and the circle expands. As the tempo increases, the men swing their arms forward with every step, while the girls do a spinning movement with their hands and arms, and with the rhythm becoming faster, the spinning movement also gets accelerated to become a dance expressing a restrained excitement. The men-dancers seem to give vent to their growing pleasurable excitement by going down to a bent-knee position, while the upper part of their bodies remains erect and straight. The stylized stiffness of their upper part is in sharp contrast to the yielding elasticity of the lower part. A special characteristic of the Kadar dance is a short hissing sound that goes with single steps, and, in particular, the longer right foot movement of the girl-dancers, like the release of an accumulated tension.

Arts and Crafts

The tribals have their own distinctive crafts which show not only imagination but also deep concentration. In a sense, their life being more isolated, it functions within its own social confines. It has some times been defined as a tradition carried over vertically, as against the folk traditions which tend to spread out in diffusion.

This inwardness has imbued their crafts with striking characteristics. They show a power and strength, a finesse that can only come from a painstaking effort, a deep concern for turning out the best. In tribal life, the canvas being small, there is bound to be greater depth, meticulous attention to the smallest details, as in a miniature, which can turn out to be a finer masterpiece than a large painting. It may be a split bamboo box or a tobacco pouch made of horn or the bold emblem on a shield. Their designs can be equally delicate and rich.

Tribal life is a firmly integrated coil, with every facet, including the crafts, forming a significant part of that whole. Thus, common usages and customs are inextricably bound up with religious beliefs and codes, none of which can be lightly transgressed. Everything made is connected with an extension of a legend, and has the aura of a rite.

Tribal crafts show an extra-functional element, that is, something over and above utility. While with us, embellishments mean emotional satisfaction, social status, and personal prestige, with the tribals, the factors involved are entirely different. What would please them is what would please the gods and propitiate the dead ancestors, who

hold a very special place in their life.

One cannot understand the material culture of a people unless one also has an idea of their faiths, social philosophy and organization. As someone has said, "A culture is a living organism which will not tolerate an arbitrary amputation." For it is this philosophy that acts as the life-blood to pump vigour into one's arteries.

Their pronouncedly aesthetic expressions like craftsmanship, singing, dancing, playing on instruments, drawing, are natural and effortless. The very action transports them to heights of happiness and fulfilment. They neither seek nor solicit appreciation from an audience or public. They engage themselves in these as part of life's functions, and do not need assurances from outsiders to keep up their excellence and quality.

The aesthetics in tribal crafts is perhaps partly to satisfy man's innate desire for beauty for its own sake, and partly for emotions it evokes. Stylization and symbolism are worked out independently of technical considerations, like reliefs in clay, or wood and metal used in decorating the house. Often, elements of decorative form are so regular that rhythmic repetition of a movement leads to rhythmic repetition of a pattern.

But the performance is not only for what the form conveys. The content is equally important. It is this basic combination of form and content which endows it with a significant value quite apart from the aesthetic, and evokes deep emotion, respect, even reverence. In their art, there is no attempt at accurate delineation, no attempt to reproduce a faithful copy of the object represented. The aim is to present what is essential and considered most relevant. The object often symbolizes some abstract concepts or ideas. The ornamental too is pregnant with a special meaning, even though it may appear conventional or commonplace.

Representative art is more apt to develop differential features, for in every area symbolic and perspective representations have their own peculiar and pronounced characteristics. Many formal elements are integral parts of every art style which give it its specific character. A certain consistency of pattern may be observed. When a definite type has once been established, it tends to exercize a compelling influence on new artistic attempts. Another form of representation is by means of perspective drawing, in which the momentary visual impression, regardless of the presence or absence of characteristic symbols, is projected. But this is not so common in tribal art as symbolism.

The non-tribals engaged in current-day education, social welfare and community services in tribal areas approach tribal creations with a sense of superiority. Indigenous designs in embroidery, basket-making, weaving, etc., tend to be replaced by non-tribal ones, because of the feeling that the latter are better. They are devoid of any sensitivity and vision to see the richness in these creations. Thus, things of beauty are dying or are being eliminated or distorted. They can be appreciated properly only against their natural background.

Besides textiles, special articles the tribal folks need are terracottas, baskets, dokra (metal cast) items and certain ornaments. As these are only made for the tribals, they are not subject to the market vagaries or fashions. The tribals have their own forms, shapes and details about each item which they are most particular about. They even spend time to supervise its production in order to ensure adherence to these requirements, when some of these are supplied by the non-tribals.

Craft for tribals is divinely inspired, and the designs reflect nature's images around them, like the lacy webs woven by the branches and leaves of trees, the traceries formed by bamboo leaves, the stripes and colours on the bodies of animals, snakes, birds and butterflies. There are lovely tales of how some of these crafts, shapes or operations originated. For instance, the art of boring holes was learnt from the woodpecker. A stone hammer was designed by imitating an elephant's feet crushing everything under them. The tongs were made by watching a crab catch a man's ankle in its clutch. The Tangsas say that god gave them the cotton seed to grow cotton and make cloth, while according to the Ashings and Singhpos, god through a dream taught one of their ancestors to weave. As Dr Elwin explains, the importance of weaving in their life can be gauged by a large number of words in their limited vocabulary that relate to weaving the various processes, materials, designs, etc. The high status ascribed to handwork can be surmised from the fact that tribal chiefs often engage themselves in turning out fine work in ornamental crafts. At one time, they made their own weapons, and surprisingly, items of jewellery worn by their wives.

The handicrafts of the tribals are all functional, even highly decorative, for use on special occasions. The priests too turn out objects in their spare time, especially items of wood-carving. Their cane and bamboo-work are pieces of art, though they are made for mundane purposes. For instance, baskets are lined with raw rubber for carrying

water or long bamboo-tubes neatly turned out for the same purpose. Pipes too are made distinctive by elaborate carving, as also drinking mugs which look distinguished, carved into warrior's faces or carrying off heads in triumph. Wooden items also are gaily coloured.

In basket-making, the tribals show a certain combination of delicacy and strength. A cane hat, though made in a lacy weave, can nevertheless be used as a crash helmet, so powerful it is. Their jewellery items made from natural materials are quite original and exquisitely wrought. Most delicate necklaces, bracelets, hair decorations are made from grass and straw. Pretty ornaments are made from the coloured wings of birds and the green backs of beetles. Dainty ear-rings are made from the soft down of birds or from the red seeds and tender slivers of bamboo. Ornaments in bamboo are usually decorated with delicate poker-work designs. Their wide variety of head bands range from flowers and leaves, attractively woven, to gleaming brass or silver. Their poker-work done on a variety of items is stunning. Most alluring are their toys, mainly different animals, rather abstract at times, but extremely striking. However, they are now giving place to plastics.

Paper-making is another important craft, but limited in production. Painting is very exclusive, the best and most worthwhile being the thanka-style drawings of sacred and ceremonial subjects, particularly of the Buddha done by Buddhist tribes in Arunachal. These are very elaborately made according to a most complicated technique perfected in Tibet. These are hung in Buddhist temples and chapels in houses. They are generally on cotton fabric, and in a wide range of colours highlighted by scintillating gold.

In specialized crafts such as metal casting, pottery, jewellery, the tribal craftsmen enjoy a certain status, even though culturally they are in no way different from the rest of the tribe to which they belong. In metal casting, they practise the ancient lost-wax process, technically known as *cire perdu*. These metal casters are known as the Mals or Dhokras in Bengal, Chungur Gara in Bihar, Ghasias in Bastar, Madhya Pradesh. In *cire perdu* or the lost-wax process, the object to be cast is made in a rough form from clay of a special kind and soil from ant-hills, mixed with sand and rice-husk which are supposed to prevent the object from cracking even under intense heat. A wax-coating is then applied for pelleting and designing, and resin-mixed wax-thread is worked out on the body according to requirements. Then the whole object is again covered with layers of different components of the special clay, together with chopped hay

or jute. At the highest point of the mould, a funnel is opened through which pieces of metal are dropped, and the mould is kept standing at the time of firing. The workers make out from the smoke coming out of the funnel when the metal is ready. The mould is next turned into the right position, left to cool overnight, and the cast then taken off.

Here production has more than a mere aesthetic purpose. Each shape or motif or colour is fixed under an unalterable injunction. What is considered unimportant is eliminated. This again allows for concentration on perfection, endowing the smallest details with a sense of sanctity. In tribal life, time is relative and not of the same consequence. The craftsman is, therefore, under no undue pressure to work to a "deadline," nor is his job carried out for some unknown stranger. It is to meet the needs of his own folk.

Nevertheless, there is a complete identification of the person with the object he is making. While the symbolic content may not be obvious to onlookers, it it keenly felt by the maker. All these symbols had their beginnings in inner experiences, no matter how simple or naive they may seem to our commonplace eyes. The tribal craftsman seems very sensitive to the raw material. One may say he is in communion with it when he is working to see many of its inherent qualities preserved even in the finished product.

In cultural evolution, tradition plays the key role, for without tradition, there could be no place for heredity in organic progression. Tradition has been termed the balance-wheel that sustains momentum through vicissitudes of trial and error.

Tradition in craftsmanship does not exclude aesthetic innovation. There is always a choice in colours as well as in the use of line and mass, and the contrasts in effect. Though they conform to the conventional concepts, there are remarkable variations. For instance, take the bead-work. The total effect of a piece of bead-work is one where artistry and practicability are harmoniously blended. The appeal is often one of contrasting textures, shiny beads against mat-skins, and of complementary colours such as light blue against dark tan.

These cannot be assessed by our aesthetic yardstick. Though each style is unique, each seems to possess the same essence vitally appealing to our sensitivity. Even though the religious motivation for art is there, it does not eliminate other stimulants such as the passion to copy nature, and, above all, the allure of personal adornment which the primitive man so cherishes.

Primitive handicraft is superior to much that has been done in the modern world. These showed wonderful ingenuity in inventing simple tools, and in evolving sound processes for manufacture. They worked with a rare co-ordination of the brain, hand and eye. The superfine weaves with delicate designs and the excellent carvings and castings testify to this. Art is an attempt to relate the individual to the universe, and, from the early times, it has been man's mode of explaining the universe. Awed by the forces of nature, early man tried to propitiate them by their personification, and trying to convert them into factors of succour and aid to him and his needs. Therefore, art occupied a prominent place in their rituals, as it served to give intelligible form to religious concepts. There were no written commentaries. These arts and crafts themselves talked, and they still continue to tell us of the early life of man more vividly than words.

Death too was, in a way, a mystery. Veneration for the dead developed motivating some of the tribal arts and crafts. At times, fetishes and masks seemed to have been more important than the figures of gods. They used materials provided by nature—clay, stone, wood, grass, fibres, and later, metals. While some were used in their raw state, others were refined to make better objects, working conceptually from imagination. With tribal advancement, certain philosophic elements also got evolved.

One type of sculpture is associated with the dead among some tribes, which may be termed mortuary art. Likenesses of the dead are made usually from a single piece of wood. These have a character all their own, although they are rough and crude, and ultimately left to decay. They are also dressed up sometimes, and usually given tattoo marks. In the days of headhunting, a number of little figures were also made to represent the heads taken.

In some tribal wood carvings, the details are fascinating. We see how sensitively an eye is carved, the way it is shaped and protected from the recessed area, how the depression joins the main level by means of a soft roll, how bold details are set against smooth surfaces, light areas are contrasted against dark depressions and elegant curves are repeated in deep, narrow, ribbon-like bands. Fine tooling is done even with simple tools to create exquisite textures.

Some of the best wood-carvings are to be seen in structures. The main pillars of the roof and the great horizontal beam running across the front of a building are carved with fantastic varieties of designs, especially of mithun heads and hornbill tails. It is believed

that tigers are carved in the dormitaries to terrify the boys and elephants as models of strength, while the hornbill is a symbol of fertility. Animal figures are strangely done with two heads or an animal eating the moon. In some places, some erotic figures may also be seen.

Modern art stands as a shadow to primitive art, as there seems some meeting point between the two. Both are not realistic. But something more than wayward elements are needed to understand or appreciate primitive art.

One of the most striking expressions of the tribals is perhaps the wall-painting done by some to propitiate the dead, as also to propagate fertility and ward off disease. The dedication is an elaborate annual rite when the picture is renewed. It is done by the householder or by a professional painter. The outer frame is done by highly decorative lines of dots or stars. Within is a house, round or square or rectangular with figures of animals, fruits and the ears of grain hung from the roof. Sometimes, the picture tells old tales of heroism or pathos.

These are wonderful dramatizations of their theological beliefs. This fusion of the pictorial art with religion is striking in its variety and excellence. This leaves one with an impression of great formality, in which the most complex patterns are under control. They have a clarity, a transparency that makes this art seem rational, calculated and imbued with a spiritual quality. Nothing is left to chance, for a supreme system fixes every detail into its place. The principles underlying the designs involving repetitions, sequences, rhythm and balance are followed through with unrelenting determination. The ornamentation practised by the tribals is remarkable for its boldness as it is for its technical excellence. Straight lines and curves are well combined. Lines are drawn with precision showing not only control of the tool used but also betraying variations natural to the use of hand. The painted decorations have a vitality and a compelling appeal. They display subtleties of design, and suggest meanings that may not be understood by us, being unfamiliar. Each design seems to breathe an energy of its own. There is no monotony about them, all elements being harmoniously integrated, liveliness and formality being merged with lines and shapes that grow out of the artist's hands.

Totem Poles

Totem poles are memorial columns, bearing the carved totem animals of the family. The totem animals may be likened to later heraldic devices, comparable to European coats-of-arms. While the carvings have symmetry, angularity and severity, the totem is more on the sculptural plane than ornamental.

Totemism is not recognized as a force in the tribal life or its arts in India. Verrier Elwin says about this—"In India, totemism has failed, rather remarkably, to exercise any influence on tribal art. Though observed and preserved, one hardly sees these symbols painted or carved in the tribal houses, with a few exceptions. On festive occasions, however, the tiger, crocodile, elephant and whatever other totem animals may be are taken out, washed, cleaned and given offerings."

Masks

The use of masks is important in tribal life, and a lot of attention is paid to them. They are to be found in a wide variety, made of wood or gourd, stylized in form and colours. These elements may also be used to distort human countenance. They are worn, however, only at ceremonials and dances. Amongst the Muria, the leader who is called the *Nakta*, wears a mask generally made of gourd. Most of them are of standard pattern, two brass-rings are put for the eyes, the nose is of bees-wax, a slit for the mouth and grains of rice are inserted to represent teeth. The hair of a goat or bear is attached as a beard, and a peacock's tuft fixed on the head. Sometimes, a tiny wax-animal is stuck on the nose. When the dances are in progress, the *Nakta* capers before them.

The Bhuiya masks are connected with ceremonial hunting. The youths dance before the hunt, wearing masks to get a verdict on its performance. One of the Mandla masks is a caricature of a sadhu made of wood, whitened with clay, and decorated with red and black bands and hair of hemp. Masks are also used at sacrifices. The Muria mask used in the Chherta and Pus Kolang dances is carved out of wood, with teeth and eyes made of bell-metal, the head and chin covered with bear's hair, the nostrils hollow and the ears pierced for ornaments. The Konds use a mask made of wood, decorated with red and white beads. The Baiga mask is made of wood, decorated with red and black designs against a white back-

ground. Some Gond masks, which are made of wood, have a beard and moustache of black horse hair, with teeth of gourd seeds and designs in red and black against a white background. Coal dust is used for painting the moustache, and sometimes, the face is coloured with yellow-earth. Some of the masks are shaped after demons, and are wild in appearance. Some have tigers, birds, snakes, centipedes and trees drawn on the cheeks and foreheads of the masks. The Pardhans make a *rakshasa* (demon) mask of a long pointed piece of wood, coloured black and red, with a beard, moustache, tuft of hair, while the mouth is rectangular, the eyes square, the ears large and projecting, and the big teeth made of gourd seeds. The bison-horn Muria masks are decorated with red and white patterns, and covered with bear's hair.

The fusion of man and animal in some masks may be basic to tribal mythology, and has resulted in combinations often suggestive of the fantastic. In addition to their vividness, they also generally have an artistic appeal. They are supposed to frighten away evil spirits, cure ailments, and consequently, forge a link between art and magic. The mouth is the most variable part of the face. It may be turned up in a smile or a grimace, while the face may be puckered or crooked.

Masks are carved or constructed, and generally form part of the religious paraphernalia used in connection with complex ceremonials. In the constructed masks, colour and a great variety of materials are pressed and moulded to create different expressions. The making of the mask is also a formal task. Each item of work is performed according to prescribed rituals by persons traditionally assigned to each task. When the mask is ready, it is termed "given life."

The human figure, though of major importance, still seemed to need other appendages for the fulfilment of certain objectives, hence, the need for masks.

Funerary Pillars

Among the monumental cultural forms inspired by the awe of death are funerary pillars. They are to be found all over India, but the best known are those of the Kerky Mundas. The pillars are erected for the dead at a special ceremony called *Sedoli*. These are made of unblemished teak wood, decorated with a carving of the deceased on a horseback, weapon in hand, and the sun and moon above. Odd

objects like a jungle fowl, a spider, a human may be added to these. Some of them are quite impressive.

Bridges

A field in which the tribals show almost uncanny ingenuity is in the construction of bridges. The bridges have been described as "marvels of untutored engineering skill." They span not only the fierce mountain rivers but even the uncontrollable mountain torrents. Indeed, the dexterity shown in overcoming the hazards would do credit to any trained engineering corps.

There is quite a variety in these structures. There are cantilever bridges of bamboo, suspension ones of rigid bamboo, footways and trestle ones, as also a combination of both. Their mastery comes out strikingly in the cane-suspension. Its tube-like shape gives a sense of security, bound as it is to powerful log frames, and for added firmness to trees, especially to bamboo clumps on either side of the water. Running from end to end are 10=12 inches wide footrests, fastened to the bottom of elliptical coils of cane. I believe a bridge can go up to about 800 feet in length.

Similarly, these people show equal ingenuity in contriving simple devices for working water-wheels, rice-huskers, grindstones, all a boon to tribal women in the far-off tracts.

Personal Decoration and Ornamentation

The earliest apparel was naturally made out of woven leaves. Though one hardly sees this now, it is worn in tribal dances, and is most ingeniously contrived, with the uneven leaves hanging like bushy bunches in the front and back. The bark and fibre cloth had a character of its own, especially the fibre textile with its silky sheen appealing to the non-tribals as well. The tribals, with their exuberance, used to scent it with fragrant vine or herb. At one time, the tiger's skin was used by men, which is how stripes came so prominently into the tribal textiles.

The tribals use simple decoration for the persons, though the effect can be ornate. Their early method was to paint the face, both with different colours and designs. In Kerala, the Palayans and Parayans used to paint their faces. Actors of Kerala drama, with their elaboration in painting faces, are a testimony to this ancient custom. The

Santhals display all the colours on their bodies at festivals. Painting on bodies is also done for mourning or as disguise as also for sexual attraction.

Much attention is also bestowed on beautifying the hair among a number of tribals, both by variations in styles, scenting with aromatic oils, or decking with ornamental combs and flowers and even beads and cowries. It is said there are 122 hair styles among the tribals of Madhya Pradesh. Hair styles as also their dress indicate their social status and domestic position, and whether married or unmarried.

Cowrie shells are a great favourite. They are worked into their costumes or made part of an ensemble with bells and flowers strung into necklaces, girdles, gauntlets, tassels in caps and even aprons for women. Girls cover the entire back of their heads with cowrie nets. They are also used as charms in amulets, and form a most important part of the festive costume, especially in dances. They are also used to decorate combs, headrests and dance shields. Strings of them are hung as streamers from the head-dress and from sticks they carry on their shoulders.

Different kinds of horns and tusks of animals are converted into embellishing headgears in the most fantastic fashion. The headgear is elaborately and exuberantly decorated with splendid ornaments of ivory, horn shells, beads, bell-metal bands, streamers, coloured cloth, glittering objects, finished with cowrie tassel, magnificient flying plumes, tufts of red-dyed goat's hair, feathers and beaks of the great Indian hornbill, horns, stiff palm-fibres dyed black, and the like. A striking artificial plume is also made of balls of coloured cotton fixed to an iron-loop going round the head and under the chin. While men flaunt feathers, women mostly wear flowers, stringing and arranging them in a variety of ways. Peacock feathers are greatly treasured not only for their majestic beauty but also as good omens.

Most tribals regard the great Indian hornbill with reverence for its magical powers as also for symbolizing courage and splendour. At one time, wearing the feather of a hornbill was the privilege of a headhunter. The imposing thrones of chiefs used to be carved with hornbill beaks and, strangely enough, the hornbill beak was also carved at the end of the chief's coffin and of the members of his family. A chain of these beaks is hung outside a house to keep off evil spirits. A beak is attached to a cap on ceremonial occasions. While the hornbill stands for valour, the mithun stands for wealth, and the horns of the latter are used for decorative purposes.

Hair is lavishly used for decoration by the tribals. Human hair is specially valued as having magical value, to make the crops grow tall and long. Some decorate their hats with the fur of bear and other animals, or cover the sheath of their daggers with monkey's hair, or attach a fringe of scarlet goat's hair to the red sash worn on ceremonial occasions. A circlet of bear's fur is worn round the head with hornbill feathers, and some even embroider their fabrics with squares of dog's hair. Wooden-carved figures often have bunches of hair hanging like bushy tails. Warriors' costume includes gauntlets of cowries with fringes of scarlet hair.

Tattooing

Tattooing is a primitive form of decoration said to be derived from *tato*, strike, which explains the operation. In Kerala, it is known as *pucha kullaka* (pricking with green), done by a special class of women known as *Kakkakalam*. Though tattooing started as a personal adornment, in course of time, it seems to have acquired social and religious significance. Tattooing has permanency, unlike painting the body, and hence, its popularity and proliferation.

The rank and status of a person becomes recognizable from the distinguishing tatoo designs. Different patterns on various parts of the body also signify attainment of different stages in life, especially in women. For instance, a chief and his family could be marked out by the elaborate designs they carry on their body as marks of dignity. A young man is said to attain eligibility as a suitor when he appears with tattoo marks. A noted warrior or headhunter has special patterns as marks of bravery. Each range of designs has a purpose, and is not chosen for mere fancy. The process is most elaborate – it has to be undertaken on days fixed by divination, signifying its ritualistic import. A feast may also be arranged on this occasion. Being painful and time-consuming, it demands both endurance and patience.

Patterns are first drawn with a blue-black or black paint made from soot over the parts to be covered, and then pricked with thorns, while someone helps keep the skin stretched. The operation concludes by applying some vegetable juice dyed blue over the lines, which is for healing the wounds. The tattoo experts are well rewarded, usually in kind with rice, rice-beer and meat.

The patterns are different for men and women. Also, they have different names for those done on different parts of the body. While

men get tattooed on the chest and back, they have more on the face than women.

Among some, this is associated with marriage rituals. It is also regarded as a form of sex attraction, and usually starts with the girl attaining puberty, or when she is betrothed it is accompanied by a nominal ceremony. Amongst some others, tattooing is done on the woman's thighs when she becomes pregnant. Later in the pregnancy or after the first-born, tattooing is done above the breasts. Singhpo and Wanchoo women tattoo on both legs from ankle to knee in broad parallel bands.

The designs are made in dots or lines. Various beliefs are associated with this operation. The Kols believe that when a Kolin dies, the supreme god (*bhagwan*) conducts her to heaven because of her tattoo marks. If she is buried, and the *baimata* (demon) comes to devour her, it will not touch the tattooed parts, which at least are able to go into heaven. Tattooing is also believed to have the power to ward off the evil eye, especially in the case of children. Feet are particularly protected by these marks against snakebite.

The designs vary from region to region, and range in forms from flaura and fauna to ornaments and deities. Distinctive of women is a cross over the navel. The entire gamut of known designs is said to cover the legs of the Gond women. Among the Todas, only women do it after bearing children. Everywhere there are women tattoo-specialists, who weave quite exciting romances round the history of this art and legends on the efficacy of tattooing. There are also songs sung by these women while working to create interest in their work and relieve their tiredness.

Stay darling stay—'tis only for an hour,
and you will be the fairest of the fair.
I have left my home, all day long I toil.
So to adorn the maidens of the land,
That erring husbands may return to them,
Such are the beauties of my handiwork.

Flower designs are so delicately traced that the skin takes the appearance of a printed fabric. Tattoo marks also prove valuable as identification marks when abductions take place. Tattooing is sometimes associated with totemism where people get their totem figures tattooed on their bodies.

Games

The tribals have a large variety of games. While in modern parlance, a game is defined as an organized occupation for pleasure or pastime and the display of skill, for the tribals, it is much more. There are games of skill demanding physical strength, those calling for agility, quickness of senses, rapidity of calculations, endurance and patience. There are those that have a bearing also on the strategies of defending the home, clan or village against marauders where tricks are called for to outwit the adversary by using one's wits or bodily manoeuvres with lightning speed. For these games, the tribals need to be light-footed, alert and resourceful to devise ways and methods for trapping small creatures for food, or to prevent destruction. Their traps are most ingeniously contrived, and would make a rich study in itself. Games also provide them with merriment and a spirit of gambol which is deeply ingrained in them.

They are superb at games of imitating creatures of the forest, like birds, animals, ants, bees, foxes, chickens, tigers, etc. Probably their proximity to the latter has much to do with it. They not only use this for fun in games but also in misleading their prey or for escaping from the wild beasts by imitating cries of various creatures. Because of their keen sense of observation and, above all, their joy in action, mimicry has become one of their favourite pastimes. The hunting games are thus more than just fun. There are also games that imitate domestic tasks such as drawing water, husking grain, etc.

Then there are games which are ceremonial, magical and religious in purpose. The game for bringing the rains is common. Some of the seasonal games have a ritual value also. There are games with serious ceremonial purposes, even to expel demons, like the famous *Bobo* in parts of Arunachal Pradesh, which is a most exciting form of acrobatics. I understand that it is also played as a game just for amusement. Tribals, however, share wrestling, archery, high and low jumps with the non-tribal world.

A great favourite is the tug-of-war. Then there are games of chance, in which the objects employed are seeds, pebbles, shells, split-reeds and other simple things, usually picked from a common heap, tossed into the air and dropped. According to the fall, the player scores. This seems like a distant relation of divination. There is a pretty game called Atoi-mal-ma Karsama, in which girls stand in a semi-circle singing, "Make my hair soft and mal-mal," and each girl goes

round the circle in turn, smoothing the hair of her companion. Some games present little village scenes or pantomimes, such as a family quarrel, stealing something, the wrangles over sales, and so on. Falconry is very popular. Young boys get the hawks when they are still small to train them carefully to catch small chicks. When mature, the birds are able to catch quail, partridge, snipe and sparrows. The hawks are kept in the verandahs of the house, perched on a specially made pole, round which an odd bit of fishing net is wrapped. This is contrived by an ingenious arrangement of strings attached to a wooden rod called *powela*, which saves them from dangling while being carried to the hunt. The boy who does it wears a goatskin glove as a protection against its bite. Along with it is a basket slung round his neck containing its feed, such as lizards, frogs, etc. Its mouth is firmly secured with a cloth, while the hawk rides on his carrier's head or hand.

The tribal generally beats the undergrowth of a tree for birds. He first releases the hawk kept hungry for the day from the slip-knot, tying it into the air with his right hand from behind his shoulder. The bird flutters wildly for a moment, then darts for its prey. When it catches something, it stays perfectly still on the ground as if it were caught in a snare, making it quite easy for the boys to recover it and its prey. It is fed only after it has got a kill. This peculiar manner of hunt has given rise to a riddle—who makes a snare for others but has his own feet caught? The falcon.

From very early times, the image of the horse has been associated with trance, a state of consciousness which at a high-pitch helps in divination. In India, clay horses are most common as votive offerings amongst tribals. Some represent their dead as riding on a horseback. Figures of horses are carved on memorial tablets. Horses are also kept in shrines and carried around at festivals to induce trance, as also to perform vigorous dances. Perhaps, their sprightliness and devotion, above all, their extra sensitivity have inspired the tribals to regard their as a successful medium to develop a kinship with their power. Cockfights are also a favourite pastime during the off-season, and become occasions for merriment and festivity, collecting entire villages to participate or witness them.

Stilts were devised as practicable means of moving over waterlogged areas during rains. With tribals, their use has also a religious significance as they are supposed to possess magical properties to enrich crops. They are made of two poles about six feet high to which

footrests are attached two feet above the ground. These are made of hollow bits of wood filled with pebbles, fixed to the pole by nails and small wooden pegs which naturally make a lot of noise as young men walk on it. A stilt-fighting game is played in which mock attacks are made against one another. Among entertainment is dancing with stilts, hopping on one stilt, and raising the other from the ground.

With the Murias, stilts remain in use until the new grain-eating festival arrives. A day after that there is a special ceremony when young men go round in their stilts holding bursundi plants in their hands, dancing before every house, beating the ground with branches to receive gifts. The bursundi branches are supposed to protect the village from mosquitoes, wasps, flies, etc.

When the stilts are broken, they are arranged over a stone. Sometimes they are tied making a square as the footrests or pegs hang from it, or they are placed upright in each corner with a cord round them. Eggs and chicken are offered at this shrine, and the eggshells tied in a string to the top of the stilts. When chickens are sacrificed at this rite, no knife is used. Cooking also cannot be done this day on a stone hearth out of respect for the stone representing the deity. Pots are kept on green pegs driven into the ground to improvise a hearth.

Here is the story of how this rite was born. Once when God Lingo's brother, Bhimul, was going out to give salt to his cattle, his little son wanted to go with him. As the ground was muddy, his mother, Gorondi, made him a pair of stilts. When other boys saw them, they, too, beseeched her to make stilts for them. One day, a boy fell down from the stilt and hurt himself. Gorondi ran up to him and healed his wound by rubbing it. After this, boys began to come to her to have their bruises healed, or damaged stilts mended. At first, she refused, but later, it was agreed that they offer her gifts of eggs and chicken. So once every year, at the end of the stilt season, they make her their offerings, and she, in turn, protects them from accidents, and saves the stilts from breaking.

Present Conditions and Conclusions

Before concluding this brief and cursory introduction to the traditional cultural complexes of the tribals, it is necessary to take a short look at their present condition, at least, touch the core of it. Despite the romanticising of their exotic habits by the intellectuals or exhibition of their dances in the various cities of the country, their basic

problems pose a big question-mark. The major part of this population remains cut off from any worthwhile contact with the society at large. Their vital needs for land and freedom of the forest have remained far from being solved. They have become complicated problems, partly because of the failure to understand a way of life from which most of us are quite distant. Depriving the tribals of the produce of the forest, their major source of livelihood, and their land, which in some states runs into vast proportions, is one of the most heinous crimes. The East India Company proved a big factor in encouraging this land grab. The new alien regime let the petty zamindars, many of whom were its own creatures, liberally help themselves to the tribal land. Later, the money-lenders and liquor-dealers seized the initiative. Loans were easily available at usurious rates of interest, and when a critical stage was reached, land was seized for repayment. Part of the borrowing was due to the temptation of easily available liquor, which once the tribals used to brew it themselves, but in moderate quantities, largely for special occasions. Surveys have shown the tribal indebtedness to be as high as eighty-five per cent.

There is a vague notion that the tribals were never really land-owners because they were not steady cultivators attached to particular fields, but moved from plot to plot to do some *ad hoc* farming. This goes against the facts of history. The series of rebellions ranging from uprisings between 1789-1832, involving the Hos, Mundas and Oraons; the Kol insurrection of 1833; the famous Santhal revolt; the Rampa rebellion in the east Godavari; the Bastar one in 1911; and the more recent one by the Gonds in Andhra Pradesh, all basically stemmed from the loss of land by the tribals.

Even the British officers who dealt with these uprisings and recorded them have declared that land is the most powerful motive in the tribal life. It is not only a means of livelihood but also a powerful link with their ancestors. No new land was taken possession of without the approval of their ancestors. Whether a tribe practised *jhuming* or permanent cultivation, whether it was owned by an individual, a clan or village, the hunger for land was always there.

We must not also overlook the fact that individual ownership and *jhuming* existed within the framework of communal possession. *Jhuming* was not a form of vandalism where each family did what it liked with forest and land. The plots for *jhum* farming were selected by the council in consultation with the priests. Moreover, it was a cooperative enterprise since it involved arduous labour, every task being

preceded by religious rites devoted to the spirit of the hills, land and forests.

In this context, it is also necessary to mention that the concept of land in the tribal mind is vaster than is usually understood, and includes the forests and hills. In fact, they often say—"These hills are ours." They so naturally call themselves "hill people." One gets the feeling that their hills mean more to them than houses to us. The landscape included streams, and the tribals had the right to fish and hunt. One can thus see how deep was the loss for these people when they first got pushed around by an alien regime, and later, by insensitive and avaracious non-tribals. Even the inauguration of the new regime did not immediately mitigate these problems. For the administration was largely guided by revenue-earning excise policies which have been on the side of the liquor-dealers and other vested interests like the money-lenders. Money alone is not the answer. What is called for is the formulation of appropriate policies to match the complexities of the problems. A curious phenomenon noticeable seems to be a relationship between the opening up of the tribal areas and their easier accessibility to them, and the rise in tribal indebtedness and the alienation of tribal lands.

It is necessary here to clarify the role of liquor in tribal life. Rice or millet-beer which is in use is an indispensable element in traditional hospitality, in bride-price, in rituals, a symbol of a pledge which binds people together. These drinks also have nutritive value. Those who have lived long with them will testify that this does not lead to drunkenness, because the motive for drinking is not to get intoxicated. In chilly winter, some kind of spirit is distilled to pour warmth into the limbs. Distillation of strong intoxicating spirit itself is comparatively more recent history. With all the other alchemies of modern life, distilled spirit too has penetrated the tribal hamlets with disastrous consequences, especially through liquor-dealers.

Attempts are being made, though slowly, to bring some relief to the tribals, and restore them their land. It may prove a Herculean task, at times, almost self-defeating. Too much time has been lost. The new owners are deeply entrenched. The untutored tribals are no match for these hard-boiled vested interests. The new trail of light we seek is beset with many dark patches.

Restoration of land to the tribals will serve to compensate them for stopping the *jhum*-cultivation, and offer greater stability and security to these long-suffering communities. The tribal economy was

also, at one time, part of the then prevailing forest economy. This too got changed as forest produce came to be "protected." So they lost free access they once enjoyed to bamboo, leaves, wood, fibres, and such other raw materials needed for making objects for daily use. Nurtured in the old traditions, they could not easily adopt or assimilate the new materials which were alien to them. Their constant reverses in the battles they waged with a wooden understanding against an alien administration, filled them with almost a sense of defeatism after some time. Their long isolation accentuated their sense of insularity as well as their fear.

Their mental and emotional make-up reflected for a very long time the continued threats of starvation, sickness and death. As they are not inhibited, these anxieties have been very much on the surface.

Perhaps, some of their vicissitudes and heart-breaks were worked out through their ancient media of ceremonies, feasts, rites and celebrations which help generate pride, self-confidence and happiness. Survival seems to have been possible even under the harshest and most inhospitable of conditions. Studies made as late as the 'sixties showed starvation and near-starvation amongst some of them. There were communities that still struggled to live by food-gathering, whose children were fed on boiled roots and tubers. The surveys showed that 85 per cent of the family income was spent on food.

A continuous material decline meant also a weakening of their social and psychological make-up, undermining their personality and sense of well-being. By going deeper into their primeval reserves, they became vulnerable to the common dangers facing them, especially when these were unfamiliar and, therefore, nameless. As their traditional education had always been designed to meet their needs all round, subjecting them suddenly to a new system that had no meeting-points with their innermost core, it could only become an assault on their sense of dignity.

The greatest and most pernicious damage done to the tribals, particularly the smaller groups, was their labelling as "criminal" by the British rulers. Though criminality is not hereditary, by this devilish act of theirs, the alien masters branded every child of these communities, as it came into the world a criminal, making it a social outcast. Its prevalence in society is subtly but irretrievably perpetuated by giving criminality a vocational and professional status by registering the entire community as criminal under a legal act. The crime of such a regime becomes more heinous than the criminal act of an

individual. When a whole community is looked upon as criminal from the early days, the young learn the ways of their elders. We have to look for causes which led to this tragedy. To start with is the disintegration of their social moorings under economic pressures driving them into territorial displacements from time to time. This inevitably leads to the loss of traditional means of livelihood.

Take the cases where forest laws drove them, or the clearing of areas which were their haunts replaced by settled colonies which had no place for them. No attempt was made to rehabilitate them. They were weak, unorganized with no support to bring pressure to bear on the authorities. They were forced to keep moving, to become nomads. There are something like five million nomads in our country. Their life becomes a pitiable struggle for a precarious existence under strange and hard conditions. This affects the equilibrium of their entire social fabric with all its related disadvantages and unsettled traditional norms, finally life losing its very essence. Then they are forced to live by their wits. All that they have to face is cruelty, injustice, with no effort to understand the vortex which they have been trapped in.

The very people who talked morals to them were often the ones who duped and cheated them, taking advantage of their helplessness and ignorance, making themselves an easy prey to exploitation. Ultimately, unrelieved social neglect and prolonged frustration must have made several of them lawless.

A Lodha poet poured his agony into the following song:

They thought me a rogue, a simple folk and
sent to the court, hands bound.
Who can avoid the will of destiny?
No man, great or tiny. Also my luck
I was caught as a duck, and put in a cell without a bail.
And I feel so lonely and curse my luck alone.
From now, shall I get half-a-plate, and starve to the bone
Like a beetle downs.
What a prospect bleak—its all a jail-trick.
I pray thee! Guard so kind set me free.
For home I always pine—
My petition did fail, the officer at cell,
He endorsed long-term—this boss made it firm,
They supplied the kits, the convict's slacks and tit-bits—

And to my comrade when I ask, they bid me work without.
Nonsense they said, the jail is no vile, respite or pause.
Toil, one must toil, not rest awhile.

It seemed to be in the fitness of things that the cause of these branded tribals should be pleaded by an Englishman, Verrier Elwin, who, at one place, quoted the following moving passage from an inscription of King Asoka after his conquest of Kalinga:

> Even on the forest tribes in his dominions, His Majesty has compassion, though advised to destroy them in detail and though the power to harry them is in His Majesty's hands. His Majesty desires for all animate beings security, control over the passions, peace of mind and joyousness.

Generally speaking, the tribals do not have the same concepts of morals and ethics as we have, for they believe in taboos. Their concept of sin is more in the nature of pollution which they believe makes them vulnerable to attacks by spirits. The breaking of a taboo by an individual may hurt a whole clan, so these determine the donts of their life. This perhaps explains their readiness to confess when they are accused of any charge. They hardly show a tendency to escape, which is strange among those who are alert and defensive. It should, in fact, be far easier for the tribals, with their closely knit society and mutual bonds, to cover up a crime or the culprit.

There are no doubt exceptions. For instance, the Singhpos of Arunachal have a definite sense of ethics with its codes. I assume it was probably because they were Buddhists, and so had developed these attitudes. However, I am informed by a researcher that they had developed an ethical sense even earlier, before they turned Buddhists, and that they had done so on their own volition.

There is no doubt that a fairly rapid alienation of these people from the tribal matrix is going on, but the process seems very subtle, popularly termed detribalisation. The tribals have begun to adopt new premises for a different way of life. They are turning to what may superficially be called modern civilization. This change occurs when people, who have their own civilized cannons and are under attack from new cultural forces, surrender. The whole process takes on strong political overtones, and political power becomes all important. Moreover, the tribe as an institution, is under attack as incompatible

with the current political and social pattern. Inevitably, there is a growing movement away from the older associations connected with the bush and jungle, and a fear that any continued identification with them may frustrate the efforts now vigorously pursued to qualify as proficient members of a modern society.

It is natural that our tribals, who were for long neglected and suffered humiliation as inferiors, should today crave for an identity of their own. As this coincides with the turbulent emergence of nationalism and the rising fervour for statehood, the search for identity gets fused into the image of a political statehood. The rapid rise of the linguistic states too must have had a strong impact on them. Thus, we witness agitations for separate states for each tribe. The tragedy is that in this overpowering scramble for these political identities, the very basis of the genuine special identity which they have enjoyed in the past is being eroded. The separate artistic universe of each tribe rapidly contracts, loses its original lustre as the emphasis shifts from the cultural to the political. In short, the detribalisation is rapidly hastened, in fact, blessed and sanctified.

The village dormitories or *ghotuls* once played an important role in the tribal life in training and moulding the young from a very early age in civic duties and fulfilling community obligations. Here were laid the very foundations of education, the young learnt their songs and dances, heard folk-tales and stories about their origin, their intelligence stimulated by challenging riddles and puzzles. They learnt of sex and its implications, and formed lasting friendships. The way of life that built up a rich store of memories to brighten the hard days ahead is unfortunately disappearing fast.

While the tribals do tend to move in a set groove, they also accept changes. Usually, if they discover something which may add to their economic well-being or general security, they do adopt new materials, tools and techniques, but in an organized manner through a clan with the co-operation of the elders and the clan-council. In a sense, this has meant the widening of their base with an added sense of satisfaction and fulfillment.

In future, if there is a continuous and harmonious expansion of the base, it will lead to better adjustments and result in the ultimate build-up of the community with a distinct personality. These changes need not be sudden mutations in attitudes. They may be slow, even marginal to start with, for they need to be more accommodative than demanding. Ultimately, when a group finds itself at a certain point

surrounded by or vulnerable to other stronger influences, it either surrenders or withdraws into itself and cracks up. When the finer aspects and traits of its own culture are disowned or thrown away, the tribe simply disintegrates, though it may continue as a political entity and enjoy even a statehood. It is this kind of assault that they have to guard against. For there is much that is of significance and lasting value in the traditional tribal life, and too precious to be lost.

Chapter Two

Tribalism in India

1 The Bhils of Gujarat and Rajasthan

Habitation

The Bhils probably form the third largest group of tribals in India. They are spread over the highland forests of Gujarat, and are said to form about five per cent of the total population of that state. Banswara in Rajasthan, however, claims to be the cradle of the Bhils. The name evidently comes from the generic term *bil*, meaning bow. In Tulunadu of South Kanara District, Karnataka, the original inhabitants are known as *billavas*, from the same generic term. But a significant aspect to note is that they themselves do not use the name Bhil among themselves, but instead, refer to one another according to the personal relationship of father, grandfather, uncle or the official title such as *naik*, the leader, *tarwi*, the headman, etc. They are generally accepted as the earliest inhabitants of the country, and referred to as the bowmen.

Origins

Although it may be difficult to trace the origin of the Bhils, there are numerous interesting references on them in the *Puranas*. In the epics, they are connected with Ekalavya. However, historically, they once ruled over territories of Rajasthan through chiefs like Dungariya, Bansia, Deova, Kotea from where the present towns of Dungerpur,

Banswara, Udaipur, Kota, etc., got their names. They were also given the posts of village watchmen even by the Marattas, which shows the confidence the rulers placed in their loyalty. It was said that once they declared their allegiance to someone they proved themselves completely trustworthy.

A mythological tale recounts how Mahadev made a doll of clay, breathed life into it, and lo and behold there was a Bhil. Like all tribals the Bhils too have their legends of the great deluge, and the survival of a pair from which time they trace the birth and spread of mankind over the earth. Here is one—a washerman, while washing clothes in a river, was warned by a fish of the impending deluge in gratitude for its regular feed. He ensconsed himself, his sister and a cock into a box, and saved himself. When the water subsided, Shree Rama (god) sent out scouts to find any survivors. The cock's crowing led to the discovery of the pair in the box, and the god asked the washerman to go about populating the world. So he had a pair of twins to start with. The god presented the first one with a horse, but the boy found he could not use it. So he abandoned the animal, went into the forest and with his progeny started the Bhils, who became forest-dwellers.

Bhils trace their birth from *satyayuga*, when Ninama and Maira, the first Bhils were born as twins. The gods became intrigued by the smell of human flesh in their midst, and decided to test them. They sent a fairy named Kakai to ask them for Maira's head and Ninama's eyes, which they surrendered forthwith to Kakai. The gods were very pleased, restored their limbs instantly, and sent them to populate the world.

The *Puranas* speak of several distinguished Bhils. There is the inimitable expert of archery, Eklavvya; the noted author of the *Ramayan*, Valmiki, who started life as a Bhil bandit named Valia. Later he became a sage through the blessings of goddess Saraswati, and his extreme grief over his dark past turned into poetry. There is the tragic incident of a Bhil, Jaratha, whose arrow hit Krishna fatally, though he had taken aim to shoot a deer. A curse is said to have thereafter descended on the Bhils, so that they are not able to handle the bow with the forefinger of their right hand. A strange comment on this is by Major Hendley in his paper, "An account of the Bhils," 1875, in the Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal:

Times have changed since then, but I noticed in examining their

hands that few could move the forefinger without the second finger. Indeed the fingers appeared useless as independent members of the hands.

In course of time, there was their intermingling with the Rajputs who were expelled from their community and sought shelter in the Aravali Hills, where they got absorbed into the Bhils.

While their relationship with the Rajputs was not uniformly smooth, they did sometimes side with certain rulers in fighting their opponents like the Marattas or Muslim invaders who created some bond between the two. This may explain the custom amongst some Rajputs of having a *tilak*-mark on their forehead made by a drop of Bhil blood. Its origin is explained as follows—Goha, the ancestor of Sisodia Rajputs, became very friendly with the Bhils of Idar and its chief, and the latter, as a token of favour, bestowed his state on him. When they decided to instal Goha as the king, one of the young Bhils cut his own finger to draw a drop of blood to apply on his forehead as a mark of sovereignty. This right is still enjoyed by the Bhils in some states where the Bhil, after putting the mark, conducts the chief by the arm and seats him on the throne. The *tika* is now made of spices and grains of rice sanctified by special worship at the time.

Gradually, however, as the Rajputs, and later, the Marattas got the upper hand, the Bhils got more oppressed and, therefore, more embittered and isolated. That they were industrious and law-abiding is borne out by no less a person than Abul Fazal in his account of Akbar's time, *Ain-i-Akbari*, where he is full of admiration for the Bhils for these qualities.

Myth and Religion

The highest amongst the Bhil deities is bhagwan (god). He is described in varied forms like *Kharo Dhain*, the true master; *Moto Dharmi*, the pious one; *Bhalo Dharmi*, the good and righteous one, and many such epithets. The Bhil pantheon is so large that it is quite bewildering. Their mythology gives vivid descriptions of their varied exploits. It has been defined as an epic tale known to every Bhil in this country. Like all tribal legends, it also gives sanction to the many Bhil social customs and institutions. One can only give here an abbreviated version of the myth.

Raja Pantha was the son of Taria Baman. He was born so huge

that a cloth had to be tied to trees on either bank of the Tapati river to form a cradle for him. Over the adjacent territory of Dab, inhabited by ghosts and demons, reigned Kol Padshah. Pantha toiled on Kol's land doing the work of fifty men to win his beautiful daughter, Pandhar. With his strength and wisdom he overcame evil spirits, received some land at Dev Mogra, and finally settled down with his wife where the biggest Bhil fair is held.

Pantha married his sister Holi to Vina Deo of Dudh Mogra, who as an excellent warrior and horseman, became a worthy friend of Pantha. Both came to be worshipped together by the Bhils. Pantha's other sister, Panud, was married to Parop Dev, but was unhappy without an issue. Bhagwan was moved by her sorrow, and gave her five grains of rice to swallow. She lay in labour in great agony, then suddenly from inside her womb, emerged the sounds of a whole orchestra. Finally, Panud delivered. First came Holi, then the Hossaiyans, the drummers and those playing musical instruments, followed by Diwali, Bohon, Gam Devti, Nil Nandervo. In all, nine times sixteen with an added nine were born from the right side, and from the left came all the animals of the forest. When the delivery ended, Raja Pantha and Vina Deo came and divided them into couples. Thus, Diwali married Nandervo and Holi Mashru Dev.

Gimb alone got left out, for he was not given a wife. In rage, he went to his uncle, Pantha, who told him that a wife was not in his fate. So he sought out Dhan Kokar, the writer of fate, and demanded to see her books. Dhan Kokar could not find mention of any wife in his fate. Under Gimb's physical threats, she finally produced some loose leaves caught in a rat hole that gave the name of Gimb's prospective wife. Under various guises, Gimb established companionship with Mohlobai, who also wanted him as her husband. Her parents wanted him to earn his right to her by working for them. He was set impossible tasks like riding a vicious horse that breathed fire. Gimb turned himself into a mare and made it so pleasing to the horse that it let him ride on its back, even when he became Gimb again. Next, he was asked to eat "nine times sixteen plus nine" buffaloes. So he turned himself into a tiger and devoured the animals. He was then asked to make a barren buffalo conceive, so Gimb blew magic over it, and it produced nine times sixteen plus nine calves. For twelve long years, Gimb toiled and performed incredible tasks, but to no avail. They finally asked for a fish twelve carts long. Pa Janjali, the water goddess and Gimb's aunt, got him the required size of fish. But to

Gimb's dismay, he found his beloved princess had already been given in marriage to someone else.

He appealed to Raja Pantha and Vina Deo. They came riding splendidly costumed. Pantha on a white horse with a colourful banner carrying the figure of a lion on it, while Vina Deo was on a black horse with a flag with a bird on it. They left their arrows behind with the warning that if they developed red spots, they would know that both of them were dead. They crossed many territories, and the Bhils show the foot-prints of these gods and their horses near streams or the water-troughs. They carried on a whirlwind reformatory campaign in whatever territory they rode through, exhorting the people to be industrious, clean, refrain from vulgarity, live in an orderly manner, regulate marital relations, avoid eating unclean food, stop all evil practices, etc. They also taught them the use of tools and implements.

Many a tyrant was laid low, many people and countries freed from oppression. They also saw to providing different food-grains, a better breed of cattle, the rearing of milch-cows and fine pastures.

Finally they came to Kol Vidiya's palace. Here they posed as expert priests, and were recruited for the marriage ceremony. Raja Pantha had arranged for his army of men to march on the marriage site. When Pantha gave the signal, his men routed the entire gathering, and Gimba was duly married to the girl of his choice.

The Bhils hold a fair every year in his name, and ask him for a mate or children. The Gods Pantha and Vina are great favourites, and remembered in every ceremony. There are many places made memorable by their presence, or exploits called *Kristhan jaga*—places of heroic deeds. Pantha has a magic, Amri Samri, with which he revives the dead, and a rope that binds or beats anyone whom he commands. Also power, *Mokot*, which enables him to take on any form he likes. Mata Pandhar, Pantha's wife, is highly esteemed for developing a variety of feed and cattle from the land of *Dudhyo Gawli* (literally milk-cowherds). At Dev Mogra, where she lives, a fair is held, and people seek from her food and progeny.

Also among the principal deities is Nandervo, the presiding deity of corn. The day he is worshipped on, all leafy food is tabooed. Hirkulyo is the god of agriculture, in whose honour there is an elaborate ceremonial accompanied by dance. Water is brought by a cowboy from a stream, and warmed in the headman's house. The priest, after he has been smeared with curd, is made to bathe in this water. He then covers his face with white cloth or paper, the dance

which has been in progress stops suddenly, and he announces the day the fair is to be held on. There is an answering cry of "ululululu," and everyone begins to shake, and the drums warm up. The male dancers are in women's clothes with soot-covered faces. The next day there is a sacrifice to the god who is also offered a clay horse and a bee-shaped jar.

Matnyo Dev is the deity of the vegetables. When the leafy vegetable, methi, is ready, the headman brings it to his house, and offers to it egg and liquor. This ceremony lifts the periodical taboo which prevails on green vegetables.

Gawli is the deity of milk and milk products. He uses butter for his hair to keep its shine. He has a coat of whey, a cap and shoes of butter. In striking contrast is Agya Khamba, the ruler of the cattle and corn land. He and Gawli are both worshipped on important occasions. Allied to them is Govaldev, the god of cowboys, at whose festival the sticks of cowboys are worshipped. The priest in his invocation says, "O Bapji (father) these cowboys worship you. Do them no harm." The sanctified sticks are then given back to them. Closely associated with these two gods is Gamandev, respected as the cowboy of the Pandhar Mata, who lives in the cattle-manger. His worship is observed at Diwali. Ketar Pal is the protector of the fields. He is propitiated before harvesting or before taking the crop home.

Then there are a whole group of deities which are symbols of different aspects of nature. The Bhils have built up a most fascinating pantheon in the world of nature. Rayer, Payer, Waghanmal and Tamanmal are the four sons of Raja Pantha and Pandhar. As they proved quarrelsome, they were driven to the four sides of the earth, and continued standing there as hills regarded as gods. There are several other hill-gods, each with a complete family.

The same sentiment is extended to water. There is Pa Janjali who came to Gimb's rescue in his adversity. She controls the seven seas, named as the small, snake-poison filled, the poisonous, the tasteless, the saltish, the sweet and the big. She is naturally worshipped at the waterside. She is the special deity worshipped when a new village is to be inhabited.

This pantheon becomes even more expansive when one enters the sky world. *Kal Waro* (black wind) is the god of rain, *Kali Badli* (black cloud) is his wife. Then there is *Bari Megh* (twelve rains), *Gayan Ghotho* (thunder house), *Thothi Vijal* (limping lightning) and *Kali Vijal* (dark lightning). These are considered as wielding control

over weather, and have the elements at their command. During the Pantha-Vina expedition, they landed in a country where every drop of their adversaries' blood gave birth to a soldier. Then they summoned black cloud, which rained so heavily that every drop got washed off as it fell, so that the wicked king could finally be defeated.

Mata Dharti, mother earth, of course shares the honours with every deity on all important occasions. She has, however, a special ceremony on the third day of the waxing moon in *Vaishakha* (April). No idol is needed—the offerings are made to the fields themselves. Equally romantic are the offerings made on the birth of a child to *Rahnyo Her* and *Dudhyo Her*, the city of life and the city of milk. For them these essentials come from some invisible sources which they must propitiate or else they may dry up. Every household has a demon goddess, Skotri, with her executive Vir. She is appeased so that she may strike her enemy.

Rituals

Mahadev seems to be the supreme deity of the Ratanmal Bhils of Gujarat, along with Indraj and Hadarfo Kuvar. The shrines of Ratneswar Mahadev and Hadarfo Kuvar face each other on Ratanmal Hill. Their importance is the supplication to this shrine by childless couples for a progeny. They keep a fast, and abstain from any impurities for twenty-four hours before they visit it, and pass the night singing and dancing. At dawn, after the sacrifice, the priest now possessed by Hadarfo's spirit, offers each couple five raw mangoes blessed by Mahadev. The couple is then called upon to share them equally, and consume the whole fruit including the seeds in perfect silence, then take a drink from the spring water.

Throughout the year they are expected to observe many restrictions, from not greeting a visitor to not plucking flowers or fruits, and not bathing in a running stream. If a boy is born, the father must look at the son only after he has propitiated the deity with offerings of a fowl and an earthen horse at the local shrine. Later, he is expected to go up the Ratanmal Hill shrine with his wife and child to make full offerings.

A unique evil spirit propitiated is the "ghost ritual" called *Anabolkan*, which literally means a taboo on speaking or social mingling. It has to be conducted in complete silence, so children have to be kept away from it. This is in strange contrast to the usual cele-

brations which call for large assemblies, revelry and feasting. It is performed when a happy event occurs in a family or village. It only takes place on the outskirts of a village, and always in the dark half of the lunar month. Being just a local affair, it is either confined to a kinship group or local inhabitants.

A major rite called *Gundara Kadvanu*, exorcism of the cattle shed, takes place in a jungle where the cattle gather for a mid-day siesta. The ceremony is performed only by the headman along with the priest. Men connected with it sit only at a distance in silence. No women are allowed, in fact, they stay home indoors. All connected with the ceremony even indirectly have to maintain a state of purity, which means, a man may not even enter a room when a woman is inside, or take food or water from anyone in what is considered a state of impurity.

The word impure has, however, different connotations here. For instance, those participating in rituals are regarded in a state of impurity because evil spirits are expected to be near these performances for them, and therefore, the entire atmosphere including the people become sullied. Similarly, as contact with water through bathing might mean breaking the link with the spirits and bringing on a curse, no bath is permitted on the ceremonial day, even for the mere observers.

There is a force and severity in the chant and the general tempo. The instruments employed are karkas and dhak, the former a variety of rasp, and the latter a small drum-like instrument with its friction surface on one end and the percussion surface on the other. These instruments can be heard even at great distances in the dead of night.

In the *Gundara kadvanu*, the priest becomes possessed as the tempo of the chant rises. He makes a slight cut in the sacrificial goat's neck to let a few drops of blood trickle on to the shrine, the *Thikru*, where the spirits are enshrined. He hands over the sword to an assistant, while another collects the goat and runs round the clearance crying aloud, and finally dropping the animal at the exit. He is accompanied by the sword-bearer and another carrying the *Thikru*. Then the sacrifice is performed, while the entire assembly keeps drumming their mouths, a sign of announcing death. As no remains should be left after the flesh is consumed, the bones are burnt in perfect silence. Until the entire ritual is completed, the village is considered polluted. The cattle is not taken out, the kitchen fires remain unlit and no work done. When the ceremonial ends, all bathe, the women clean, wash and start cooking, the men keep singing and dancing, relieved from the dangers of the evil spirits.

In striking contrast is the *mela*, a festive celebration in fulfillment of a vow through singing and dancing. On that night sacrifices and offerings are made to Indraj. These are even sent to those invitees who could not attend. Women lead forward when the sacred bough is taken out in a procession for the immersion ceremony singing, loaded with auspicious things.

While Sital Mata, Kali and other mother goddesses are worshipped, a distinctive Bhil deity is Vejwa Mata. She is mainly worshipped for bodily deformities. A recovery is marked by the offerings of artificial limbs to the goddess, Sunday being the special day of observance. The tribal goddess is invoked when the clan is in trouble, when invocations and offerings are made. This is called *Purbaj Ramana* or the recreation of ancestors. The special feature of this rite is the night-long session held by the worshippers with the deity, when the latter is bombarded with ceaseless questions regarding the problems of the community.

They also revere Waghdev, the tiger god, usually represented by a stone outside the village, and the serpent-god, Bhatidev, whose shrine is recognizable by the white flags flying over the stone consecrated to him.

Tree Cults

As they live in close intimacy with trees, the Bhils have come to identify them with supernatural benevolent spirits. The most respected trees are the mango, amri, banana and pipal. Planting the mango tree is obligatory, done as a ritual. The following legend explains the religious sentiment attached to it. During their banishment, the Pandavas sojourned in a beautiful mango grove for peace and meditation. Indra, suspicious and jealous, decided to break this quiet, and arrived as an ordinary human being. With great courtesy, the hosts asked him to name his favourite food, and he asked for a dish of mango juice, well aware they had none. Bhima then planted a mango seed, and between the magic of their five hands, the brothers were able to produce a perfect fruit out of which Draupadi prepared a delicious mango juice. Indra departed, fully satisfied. This magic tree is still supposed to stand, and the Bhils continue to worship it by pouring milk, curd, water and uncooked grain over it. An annual fair is also held there to commemorate this event when the site becomes a place of pilgrimage.

The most popular and sacred among the trees is the pipal, with many taboos attached to it. No leaves or branches can be cut. Its special worship is on Dasha Mata day in *Falgun* (March), when women observe a ritual, and go around five times wearing the Dasha Mata's string of ten threads with seven knots around the neck, and listen to the chants reciting the greatness of the goddess who fulfills whatever is supplicated from her. Here is the story of how this ritual came to be observed. Queen Damayanti, wife of King Nala, used to observe the Dasha Mata rite. But when she put on the cotton threads with gold ornaments, King Nala objected. Angered by this, she tore off threads offending Dasha Mata who punished them. They lost their kingdom, and while wandering hungry, even a handful of gram turned into iron because of the curse. Clay-pots cracked when their shadows fell on them. Distress dodged them at every step. They finally retreated into the forest where they were advised by the lord of the castle to observe the Dasha Mata ritual, which they did, and consequently, were restored to their former glory.

Amri is another sacred tree. Its legend is traced back to the dark days when the bandit Valia used to terrorize travellers, until god brought enlightenment to him, and he became the poet sage Valimiki. He was enjoined to circle the Amri tree to shed his past burden, and get liberation. So people wishing to get purified go round it. A most important feast, *Amra Ekadashi*, is celebrated on the eleventh day of the rising moon in *Falgun* (March), when a fair is held near the tree. The banana tree too is held in veneration, but hedged by a number of taboos.

They also worship the weeds which grow on river banks, and called Kator. Where there is no waterway for their growth, the villagers have installed a stone instead of Kator Ma. She is the special goddess for the protection of children, and her worship takes place in the month of *Aswin* (September). Mainly women worship her in their ceremonial dress. The offerings are in the shape of small bundles of freshly cut Kator weeds (*Andropugon huricatus*). Only cool things have to be used for the ritual, for it is believed that hot things cause pain in the deity's body.

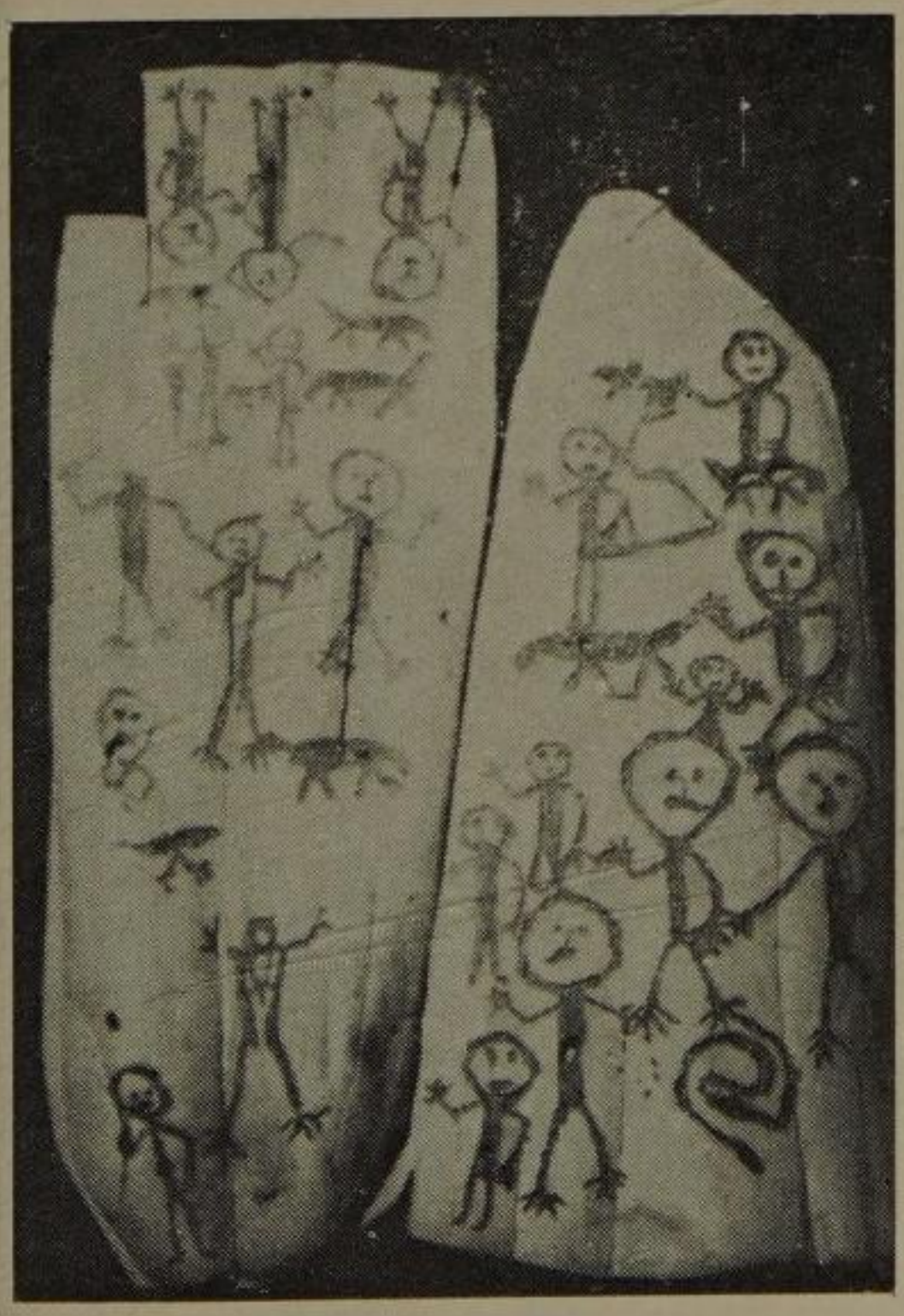
Here is the story of how the Kator Varla originated. In a Bhil family, there were seven sons and their seven wives. The parents treated the six boys and their wives well, but were cruel to the youngest. They were made to work the hardest, and got only the left-overs to eat. On the day before the Kator ceremony, the six wives

A close-up of a folk dancer from Lusha Hills, Mizoram.

Musical accompanists to the folk dance from Lusha Hills, Mizoram.

Tangkhul Naga Dance.

Doll-making by Wanchoos in Tirap district.



Poker art of Wanchoos.

Wanchoo wood-carvings.

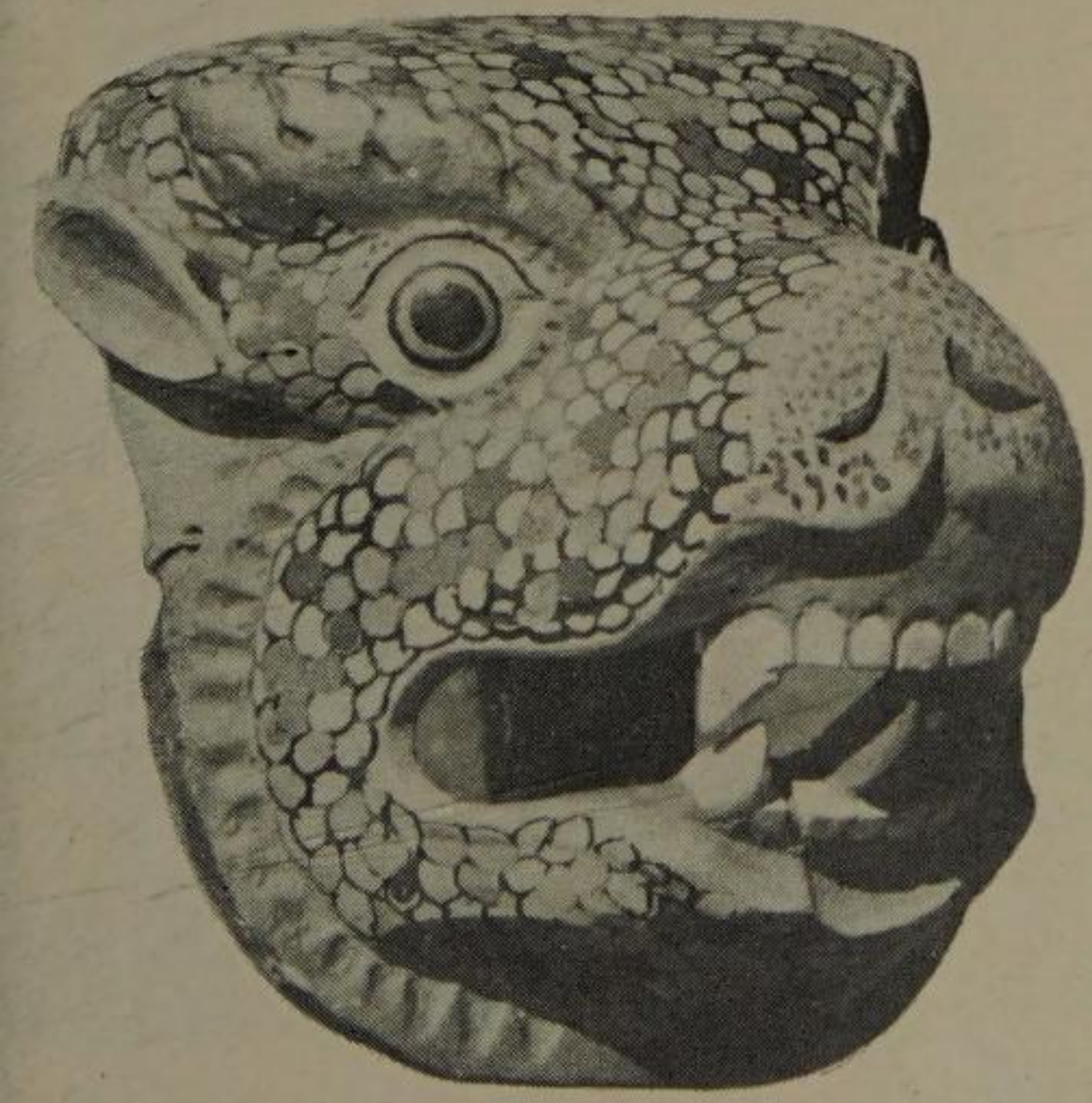
Wanchoo wood-carvings.

Khamti demon musk dancers, Lohit district.

Khamti dancers in their traditional dress, Lohit district.

A woman from Mago area Zung, Tawang in her traditional dress.

A wooden musk of demon used by lamas of Tawang monastery in their folk dances.



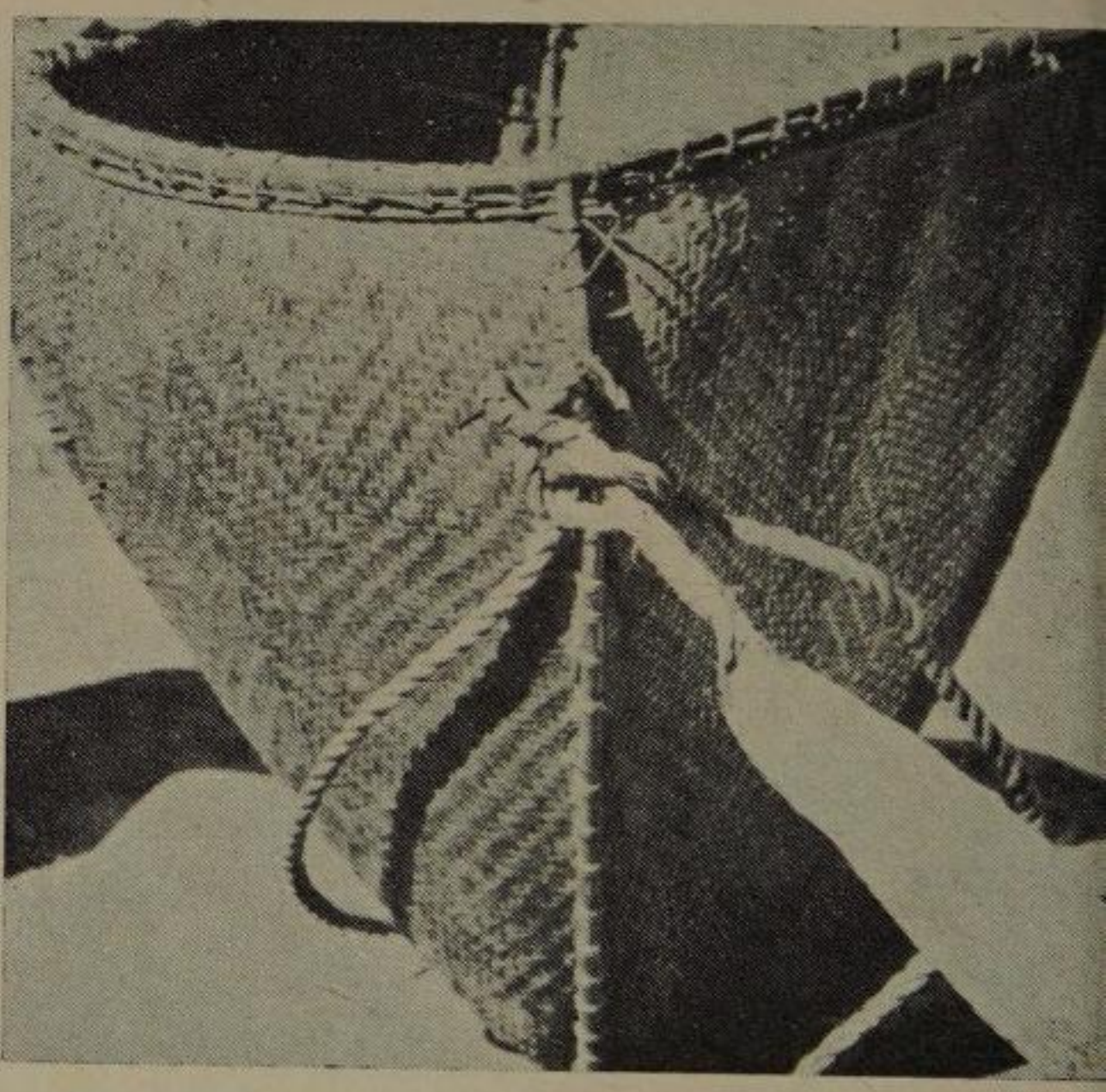
A wooden musk decorated and painted used by Monpas in their festival dances.

A tribal terracotta bull from Assam.

Nagas weaving on new looms in Manipur.

Nokte—a tribal of Tirap, Arunachal.

A necklace of Lumbadi.

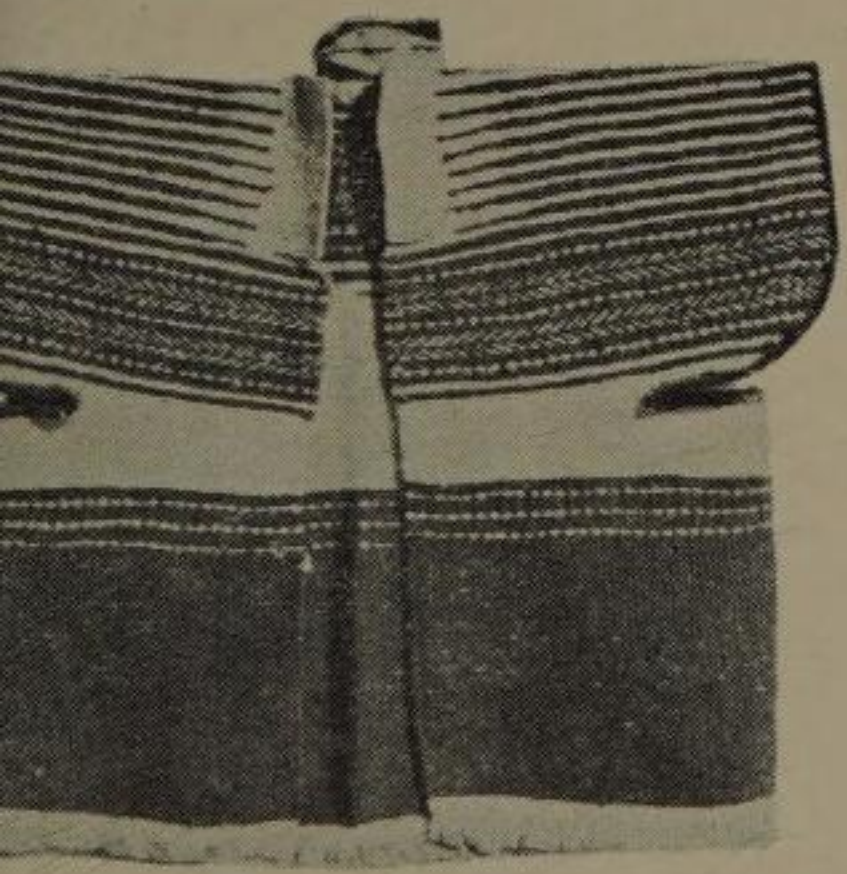


A Lakher cane-basket.

Carpet-weaving, Kameng, Arunachal.

Memba musk-dance of Siang, Arunachal.

A Apatani couple, Arunachal.



A woollen coat made by the Idus of Lohit, Arunachal.

A typical tribal hut.

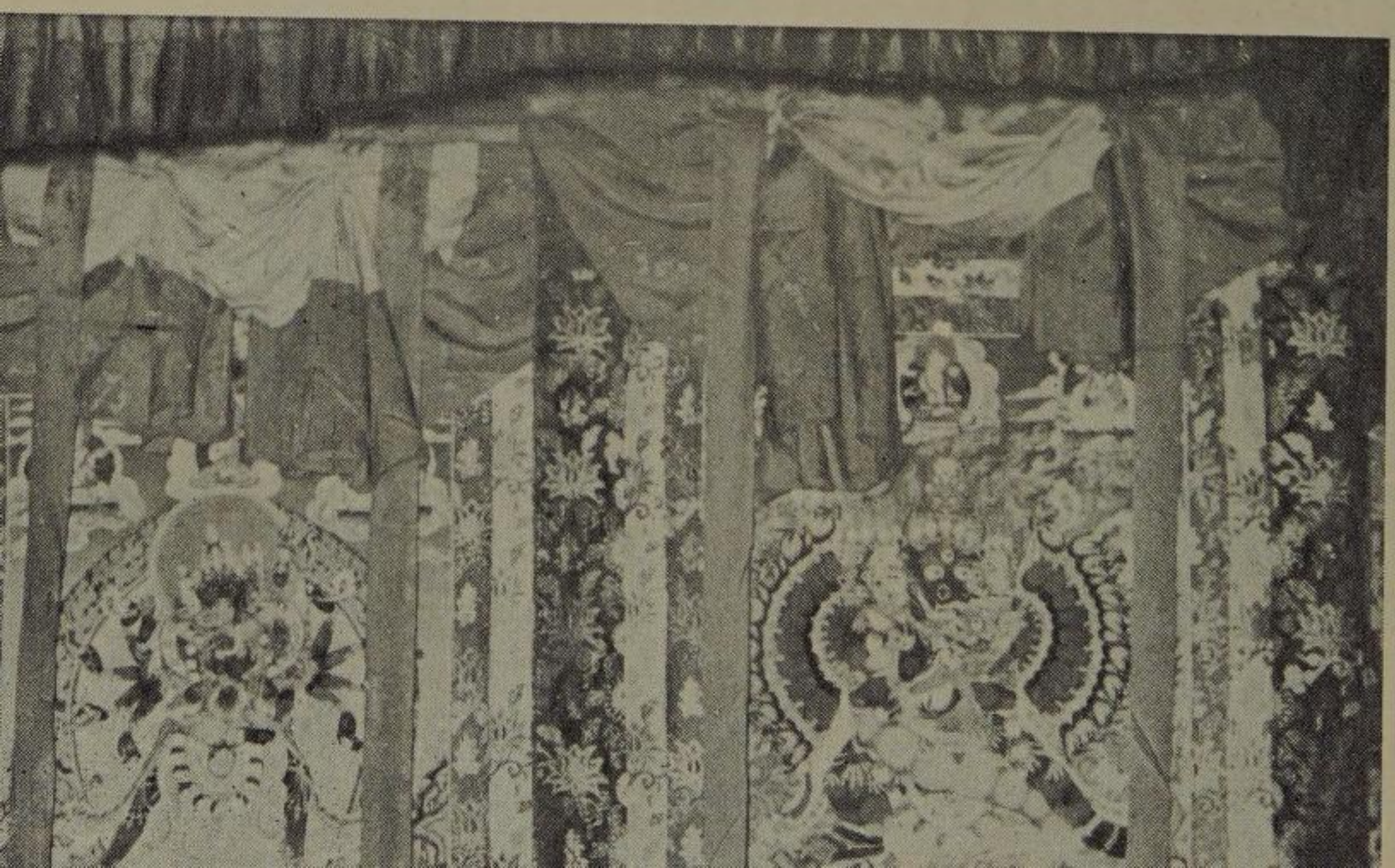
A Aka couple of Kameng, Arunachal.

A Minong couple of Siang, Arunachal.

Lama musicians of Sikkim.

Tribal prayer flags.

Decorated thankas made in Kameng district.



A view of Monpa couple in their traditional dress, Kameng district.

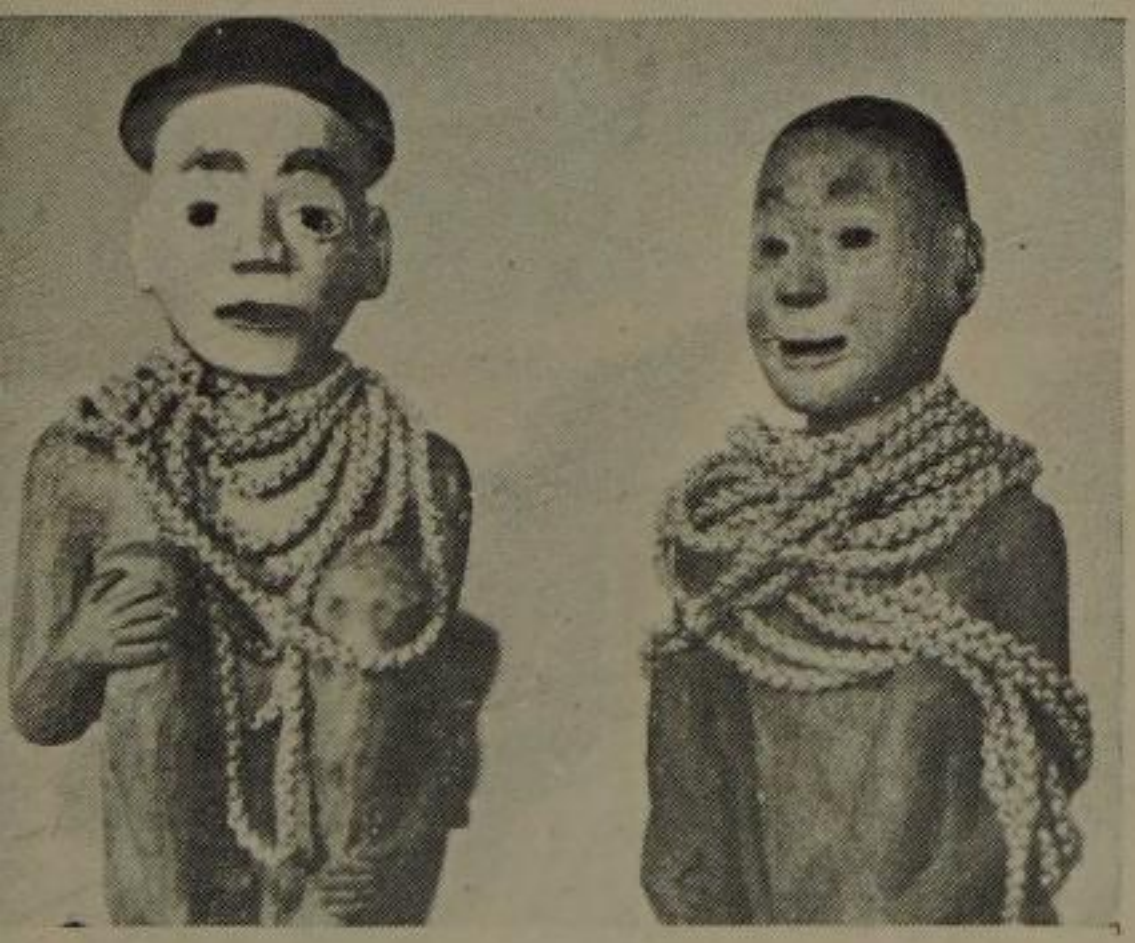
A Chamba dance, Himachal (centre).

Musicians of Himachal Pradesh, Poon district (below).

A folk dancer from Kashmir.

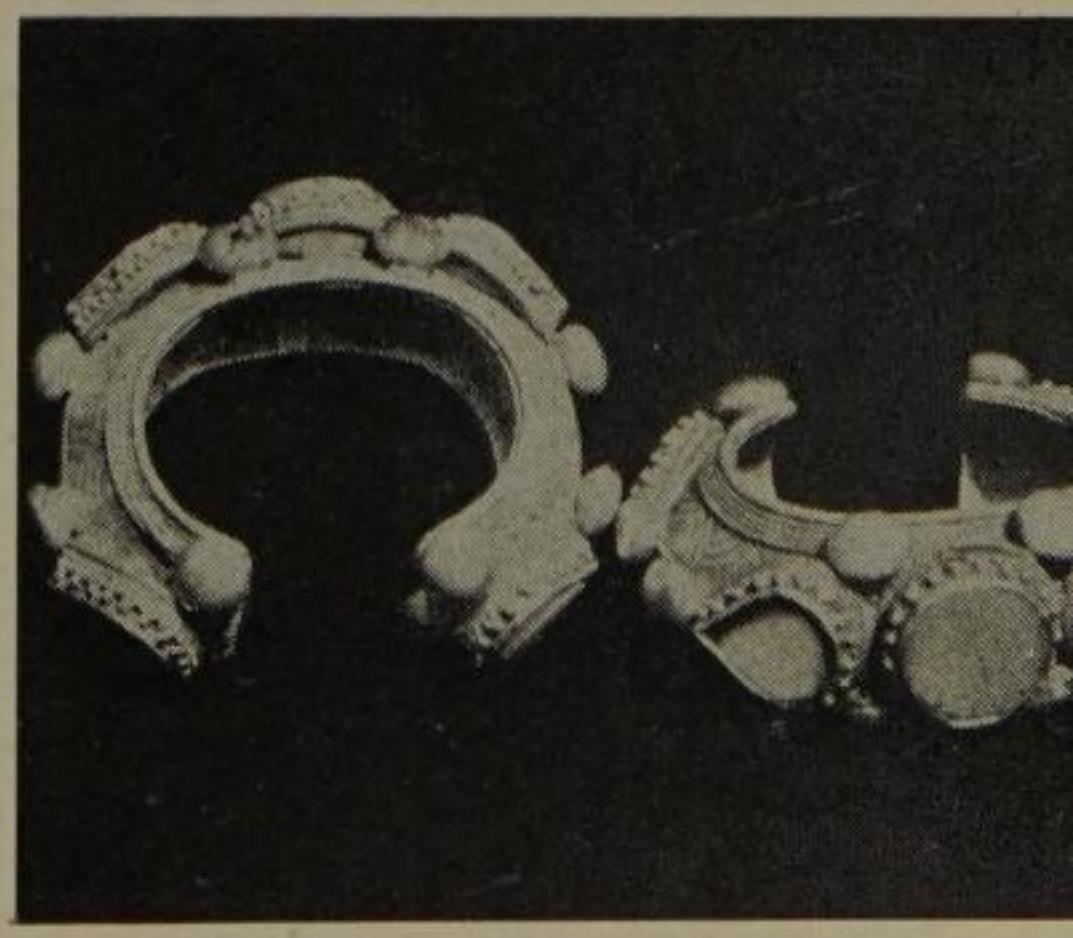
A tribal terracotta elephant from Gujarat.

A tribal terracotta horse from Gujarat.

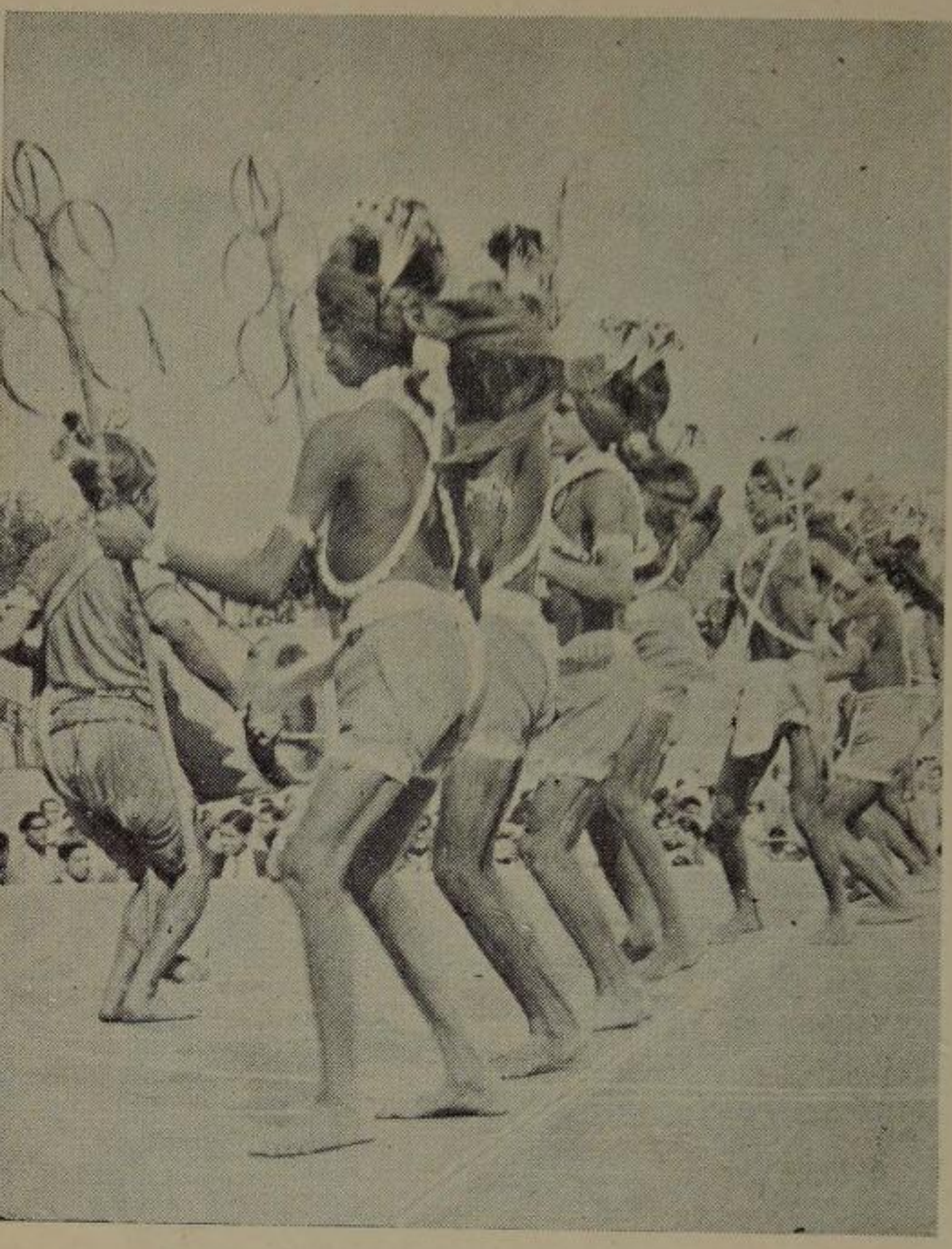


Tribal wood-carvings, Maharashtra.

Terracotta animals (miniature bulls) from Bastar.



Tribal bangles from Himachal Pradesh.



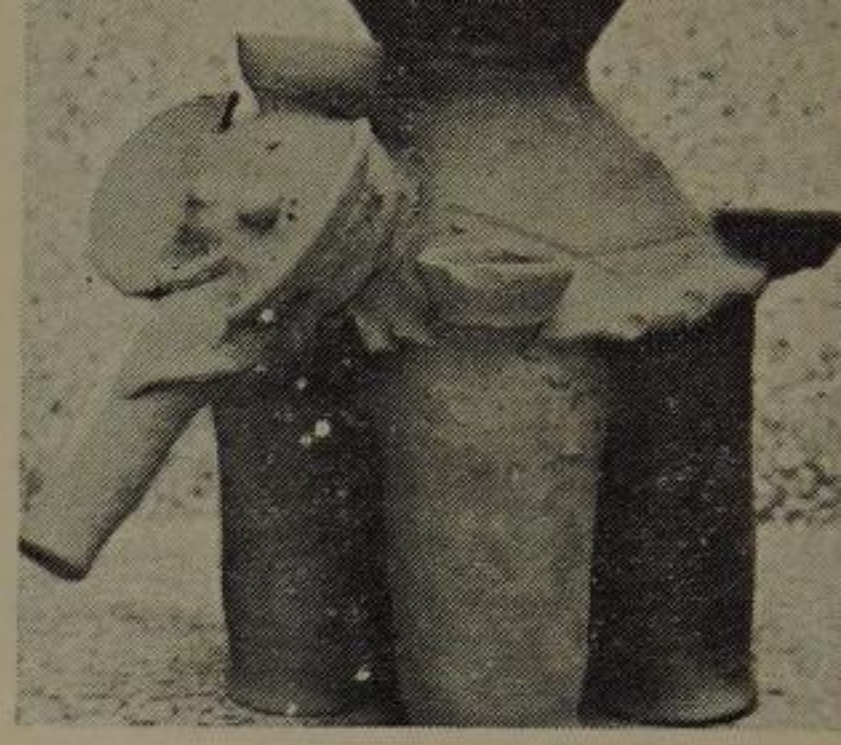
Chadigas of Gurgaon district.

Santhal women dancers.

A close-up of a folk dancer from Jaunsor Bawar in U.P.

A close-up of a folk dancer from Bihar (Purnia district).

A tribal terracotta from Rajasthan.



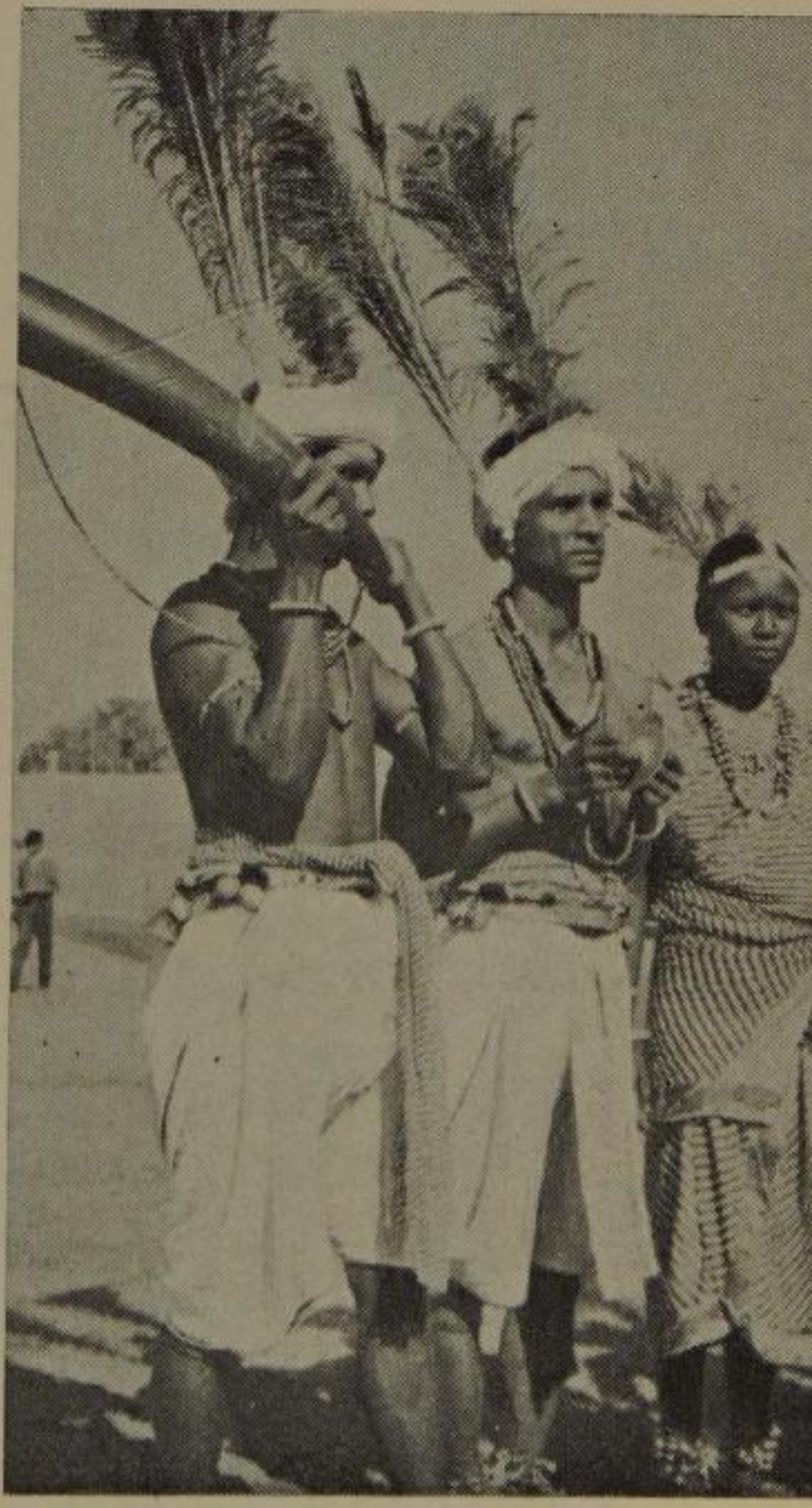
A tribal terracotta elephant from Singhbum district, Bihar, used in marriage rituals.

A group of Bhumiay tribals from Orissa.

A close-up of Oran folk dancers from Orissa.

Bhoota spirits worshipped in north and south Kanara, Karnataka.

Women dancers (Mathuris) of Andhra Pradesh.



Gonds from Bihar.

Mandulas from Andhra Pradesh.

Musical accompanist to a dance number from Pondicherry, Madras.

were asked to prepare cold food for the deity, but they were too lazy to pay proper attention to the preparations. So when the weeds received the offerings, they felt they were on fire, and cried out in agony. The youngest daughter-in-law quickly cooled them by sprinkling cold water. Pleased by her thoughtful action, they promised her all help in distress. Soon, the youngest son despairing of his fate, left his home carrying only some gram and cowdung cakes. When he sat down to eat, he found to his amazement that gram had turned into jewels and the dung cakes into bars of gold. He became a wealthy man, constructed a temple, a tank and a well. He enjoined his family, now in difficult circumstances, never to offend the Kator deity.

Agricultural tools and implements are also worshipped, for any mishandling of them would mean the destruction of the family. Even the Christian Bhils are said to perform this ceremony. *Raksha Bandhan*, a noted Hindu festival, observed on the full moon of *Shrawan* (July), has a special significance for the *Bhils* as dedicated to the tools.

Manure too is worshipped, which perhaps is logical, for it provides fertility and prosperity to the soil, and produces a bumper crop. That too is taken as a form of deity. At marriage, the couple is brought before the manure heap called Akuri, even before the marriage ceremony. The priest ties a copper coin to an arrow with a thread which he hides along with the wooden measure inside the heap, and the couple has to search and find it, raising a lot of dust. The couple is then asked to make their obeisance to the manure heap.

Festivals

Holi is an important festival. It is not a borrowed version of the Hindu celebration but has a Bhil background, for the goddess Holi is also called Jogan Mata, mother of the universe, who was born out of Panud's right side, and married to Mashru Dev. She is symbolized by a green bamboo pole specially erected. A bonfire is lit around it, and singing and dancing in praise of Holi Mata starts far ahead of the actual festival day. Here is one of the songs:

Once in twelve months comes Holi Bai;
She took a lot of time in coming, this Holi Bai.
Holi and Diwali are sisters two;
They sat and said, "Let us go, let us take the road,"
"But how shall we go," said one.

"You go in summer and I go in winter,"
said Holi to sister Diwali.
Diwali took Dhol and Pawri, Holi Bai came with Jatra.
Once in twelve months comes Holi Bai.

This is essentially a community festival, and money is collected from every house for the feast. There are no animal sacrifices to Holi, but only coconuts, flowers and the like. A small packet of bread and jaggery is tied at the end of a bamboo pole. When the fire leaps up, the bamboo is cut from the top, and whoever does this at one stroke is given the bundle. Those who attempt and fail are fined by the headman. There are special male-dancers called Gosais to do the Holi dances. They have to lead a strict celibate life, and must not even touch their women's clothes from a month before the actual occasion. For the dance, they dress as women, wear ornaments and rub soot on their faces. They dance throughout the month, stopping only five days before the Holi.

For the Diwali celebration, earthen lamps are lit and placed on the steps. Then a torch of bamboo chips is first moved round the family hearth and then carried out singing to the refrain—"Go Diwali come Holi." The bamboo chips, except one, are thrown beside a nearby tree, and the single one is brought home by the women, stuck against a winnowing fan, and then, together with some ashes from the hearth, is put outside the house. A man then goes round the houses collecting them, and receives in return, a bread from each house. The Bhils then bid farewell to Diwali by throwing burning sticks at the trees.

The river is worshipped directly. As water rises with the coming of heavy monsoon, the people gather on river banks to make the usual offerings. If the level rises to a danger point or there is apprehension of flood, an appeasement of the river goddess is made. In addition, the Bhils also worship sacred water-springs.

Dances

Bhils are well known for their large variety of dances. Every important event in their life is linked with a special dance and song. During Holi, many different ones are performed. One is by women who move round and round slowly, holding one another at the waist with one hand, and moving forward in a semi-circle towards the drum-beater in the centre. In another dance, at every third step, each one

strikes the anklets in her legs against another, thus producing a rhythmic but somewhat hollow sound. There is another women's Holi dance in which they move round and round jingling the anklets. An all-male dance is done in vigorous steps, moving rapidly towards the drummer, but mostly as repartees to girls' cooing.

The Gosai dance is also done at this time at a fast tempo with the orchestra. The latter consists of one person rubbing two bamboo chips against one another to produce a musical sound, while a second plays on a pawri, and a third beats the drum with an occasional cry of ti-ri-ri to which the chorus answers with uru-ru-ru. Sometimes, the whole village joins *en masse* in a dance, immediately after Holi, in which there seems to be a competition for wearing the gofno, an ornament on the head.

On the Diwali eve, there is the picturesque Damdyaras dance by men who sometimes dress up as women, with bells on their ankles, all dancing round in a circle striking sticks. Occasionally, a dancer may take a long leap to strike at a stick far away, like a shaft of lightning. All this while, the drummers play inside the circle. The tempo gets faster as the figures fly, their sticks strike, and the bells jingle with a resonance. Colourful costumes are worn for this dance which makes it truly ravishing.

There are special dances for ceremonies like marriage, death or any eventful occasion in their daily life. Important amongst these is the one performed immediately after the mingling of the bride's and groom's parties at a marriage. One of the bride's party-members carries her on his shoulder, and goes around swaying and jumping to the drum-beat and the flute music. A few steps behind follows a group of three women with their arms around one another's waist. While dancing, they go two steps forward and one step backwards, and these movements and steps are repeated. Three other women dance behind them in the same way keeping distance between the two lines. Another three follow thereafter. Simultaneously, the men-folk do a dance in a chain group of ten to fifteen persons. They too rush forward towards the drummers, and then retreat and move again, and this goes on. This dance is also done at a slower tempo by men and women together forming a chain.

Dance is so closely interwoven into the life of the Bhil that nothing seems to move without a dance or song.

Poetry and Song

The Bhils possess a large number of songs. Here are a few specimen of Bhil love-songs:

Boy: I fell in love when we were young
How is it possible to kill that love?
How can I eat, drink and be merry, O girl?
Girl: What is it you want, boy?
If you wish to go, let us go.
Boy: Go beyond the Rewa, wading the deep waters.
Whose bangles are you wearing?
Where are you going with shining bangles, girl?
Where shall I find you, my girl?
Girl: I will meet you on the road bordering the field.
Where should I wait for you?
Boy: Wait for me on the road to the grazing, grounds.
The night is dark, so stay with me.
If you want, you can stay.
I will give you whatever you want!
Which is the village you come from?
Girl: What is the use of asking my name?
If you are brave, do the work, O boy

× × ×

Young calves and my sheep, O Khimla, we'll graze them together, O Kharadi,
Your dalia and my mahuda, O Khimla
We'll eat them together, O Kharadi
While grazing cattle together we began to love.
"Where shall we go"? We decided to fly away together.
"Let us to Godhra go" "And what shall we eat?"
"The Kotwal at Godhra, is he very bad?"
We tried to go, but O but O!
Money was spent and love was lost.

× × ×

Swing, O Baby, swing, I put you in a silken swing.
O hush thee my baby, otherwise there is a scorpion there
And it will sting you. Sleep my baby.
See how the mischievous baby sleeps.
Your father has gone with an axe in the forest, sleep, dearie,

sleep
Your mother has gone to foreign realms.
Your father has gone to Nandod;
He will bring mamra for you; you will eat them all alone.
Sleep, baba, sleep, mother has gone to foreign realms.

× × ×

A neem tree near my house stands
In the horribly hot summer;
The neem blossomed sweet.
Parents' love is incomparable.
I searched out the whole city,
None like my father and mother could be found;
The neem blossomed sweet.
We searched out the whole city
None like my brother and his wife,
None like like my sister and friends could be found.
The neem blossomed sweet.

× × ×

O clouds, bring us rains!
O rains, drizzle in tiny drops,
O clouds, bring us rains!
O rains, come to the wells,
O clouds, bring us rains!
O rains, look at our cows,
O clouds, bring us rains!

Dramas

Bhil dramas are known as Sawangs. They are a total panorama that combine story, song, dance and music. Each drama is short, barely lasting a quarter of an hour. Only men act, and the women's roles are also played by them. The actors are called songadia. Some have religious significance, others are secular that can be acted anytime, anywhere. Sometimes, the show is put on in fulfillment of a vow, and is done before a deity. The actors have to be present at every fair and enact scenes. The songadias are supposed to have been born from the left side of goddess Panud whom the Bhils regard as the source of all creation.

Usually, moonlit nights are preferred for their presentation, as natural light is preferred to flares or lamps. The ground selected is

circular with spectators sitting all around. There are no elaborate costumes or make-up. For instance, a man is supposed to look old with just a big scarf tied round the head. Usually, similar simple symbols and actions convey the dramatic content and the various characters. The themes are simple. Here are two specimens of their drama.

Drama I

Enter a boy and a girl, grazing their cattle.

Boy: Let us dance.

Girl: Yes, let us.

Boy: See how strong I am.

Girl: It is very good.

They dance round and round when a tiger is seen coming.

Boy: Oh, I am afraid

Girl: I am not. It is a dog.

The tiger roars.

Boy: Oh, it will kill me. Let me hide between your legs.

He tries to enter between her legs. The girl goes on moving, and tries to thrust him away.

Girl: You fool, you coward, my mama's son. You impotent one.

The tiger goes away, and she keeps scolding the boy while dancing.

Drama II

Enter a man and his wife dancing.

Man: Wife, who is the strongest man in the world?

Wife: How do I know?

Man: Eh! He is standing before you.

Wife: You are the strongest man in the world?

Man: Yes.

Wife: I will see.

Wife goes. Enter some friends.

Man: Friends!

Friends: Yes?

Man: If you wink at my wife when she goes to fetch water,
I will beat you all.

Friends: So strong?

Man: O yes.

Friends: We shall see.

Wife is at the well, and the friends wink and whistle. The wife cries. The husband comes in and beats them all.

Wife: Very good.
Friends: You are very strong.
They go away. Another man comes in and gets very busy.
Man: What are you doing?
Other man: I am squeezing stones to get water.
Man: Will you fight with me?
In the fight, the other man is defeated and leaves.
Enters a third man.
Man: What are you doing?
Third Man: I am drawing all these twelve carts myself.
Man: So very strong? Will you fight with me?
They fight, and the third man is defeated. He departs.
Man: Wife, who is the strongest man in the world?
Wife: The man is standing before you.

The drama also includes dances called sawangs. During the pauses in the play, for instance, about a Bhil girl and her lover, the jodi and the joda dance is performed in quick movements and symbolic expressions of a variety of emotions.

Musical Instruments

The Bhils have a large number of musical instruments. Amongst the important ones are tom-toms known as *ton*; cymbals are *kartanas*; a bamboo flute is a *yabli*; a larger flute is a *pavho*; a palm-leaf flute is called a *piyari*; a whistle is a *piyho*; the clarionet is the *shehnai*; musical pipes are *tamburs*; a mouth-piece string which is held tight and vibrated with the nails is called *turi*; *tingari* is a small *tambura* made from a coconut-shell with horse's hair attached to a small stick; *mandol* is a small tom-tom. In addition, a small bronze *thali* is beaten with a stick.

Society and Social Events

The Bhils are divided into two broad groups—the hagas, who include brothers, cousins, clansmen and the wider circle of the hagas on the paternal side. Marriage between two hagas is not permissible. The other group, hagwadia, is made up of the marriageable relatives. Thus, before an alliance can be broached, the interested party has to be sure whether the prospective boy or girl is a haga or a hagwadia.

The Bhil's extraordinary proficiency in archery is typified in the

famed Ekalavya of the epics. It is related how, although he had cut off his right-hand thumb to offer his fees to his preceptor, he could still shoot arrows with perfection.

Bamboo is an indispensable material for them, for it is used for many purposes from building structures to eating. A riddle about bamboo expresses this vividly: "Who is the man with twelve names? The bamboo."

Apart from their vast knowledge of the flora and fauna of their region, they also seem to have some knowledge of the stellar world, which they describe in their own inimitable picturesque way. The Pole star is known as Monio Taro, and the Great Bear is described as a golden cot with three silver legs borne by a chief pursued by three dogs. They know several other stars, Punarvasu is described by them as the egg of the oni bird. Near it is a cluster of stars which they say is a cowherd with his bunch of cows, waiting to steal the eggs. Falgurin is the torun (welcome arch) of Raja Pantha. The sun and the moon have three wives each in the east, the west and mid sky. *Kalo waro* (black wind), son-in-law of Raja Pantha, has many issues like twelve rains, the thunder house, the black and the limping lightnings.

Ceremonial Rites:

Child Birth

The life of the Bhil children is marked by many rites, starting with the milk-sucking, when the child is ceremoniously put to the breast by an elderly woman two days after birth. Till then, someone else has to feed it. There is always a search for any recognizable marks on its body to give a clue as to which of the relatives has been re-born in this child. The child must not be given the father's or grand-father's name.

Marriage

A conventional dialogue takes place between the two in-laws when the bride price has been fixed. The girl's father pleads with the daughter's prospective father-in-law, "Let her be peaceful in the house. If she comes back weeping, the curse will be on us. Do not call her names. Do not ask her to do hard work. Reasonable work

must no doubt be taken from her. Do not grudge in feeding her; whatever you eat, let her eat the same. You have seen the girl, and you don't find her bad. If you call her evil-faced afterwards, and throw her out of your house, we do not know what we will do. We may, of course, call the village elders and lodge a case." Whereupon the father of the boy agrees saying, "I do not want to throw away the money I pay you. I will see that she is well kept in my house." Then the girl's brother or a near relative unties the cloth covering the liquor pot, and for this he gets the money tied to it. Each guest is given a leaf which is folded into a cup and the liquor poured into it, the quantity being determined by the age, the elders getting more, the younger ones less. A little liquor is poured on to the ground by each as an offering to his dead ones. The drinking marks the betrothal.

Meanwhile, the fathers and mothers-in-law go to the backyard of the house, and drink out of leaf-cups, the two fathers and mothers exchanging cups, and later, the fathers exchanging turbans. The wedding date follows automatically nine days later.

A ceremonial marks the paying of the bride price, too. The money is mixed with rice and turmeric, ornaments if they are part of the payment and a fowl. As this is being made over, the women sing:

Count the rupees before taking,
Sound the rupees before pocketing;
See if they are good or bad
Count the money, count them all.

If the boy's party is in straitened circumstances, the bride's parents give them a period of grace when the payment can be made without strain. "I do not want to see my daughter in difficult circumstances," says the father. After this, two small threads are prepared from the bark of a tree and tied into nine knots, indicating the nine days to the marriage, and rubbed with turmeric. These are exchanged between the fathers of the boy and the girl. Neither should lose the thread, and if one does, a fine is imposed. As each day passes after the marriage, one knot is untied.

The nine days are very full. Relatives and friends come to help, and they sing as they work. For each job, there is a special song.

Before the house of everyone, a pavilion of leaves is erected where dancing goes on after sundown. At the bride's place, the bride is hoisted on the shoulders of the dancers as the dance grows more vehement.

Similarly at the bridegroom's, the dance continues late into the night. After the last knot on the betrothal-thread is untied, the bridegroom's party sets out carrying a special red and black basket called podule, decorated with six bamboo rattles, a fan and toy-birds. It also carries two bead-collars, red and white, bangles, comb, two cloth-pieces, a *choli* (blouse), hair oil, *sindhur* (red powder for the forehead) and a bottle of liquor. The bridegroom is given a ceremonial bath, new clothes and ornaments including a knife, while his face is covered with wreaths hanging from his head. The carts and their bullocks are gaily decorated with colourful fabrics and beads, and the procession moves to the singing of songs by women. The bridegroom sits in a special cart with either a young boy or girl called Arvo.

The Bhil marriage is marked by six processions, each called vana or vano, each conducted in the boy's and girl's village separately till the couple comes together. All the villagers are invited to join it. The first is on the day, Piti, when a mixture of turmeric and flour is applied to the boy and girl. The second one is to pay respect to the streets and lanes of the village, for they are considered sacred. The third procession is in honour of Bharwa who is said to control evil spirits. The fourth is to venerate the ancestral deities with offerings. The fifth is to worship the pipal tree, when a miniature cot is offered to the tree so that the couple may always have a bed to rest on. The sixth is to pay homage to the manure deity.

Here is a typical procession song:

Our bridegroom rides a white horse,
He looks very gorgeous, he has a dagger at his waist,
And a thread. He looks very beautiful.
O bridegroom, swords clang on your way, and you ride a white horse.

The bride has to put on the clothes and ornaments from the basket, while the women keep singing:

Where is the collar band? Where the Chirkya?
Bring the comb, where is the hair oil?
Adorn the bride, where is the collar band?

The priest offers worship with paddy and bilva leaves as the main

ritual starts. Then a chicken is made to sit next to the couple, for it is believed that if it keeps sitting quietly it is an auspicious omen.

The dancing starts as the wedded couple comes out. The pedule now empty is tossed, and there is a scramble to get it. In the process, the two marriage parties get mingled, and this is taken as the symbol of the two getting bound together. The couple also joins in the dancing.

The next ceremony is sending the bride away with the groom's party. A formal farewell is gone through when the parents offer wise words to the couple: "Daughter, do not hear any evil talk about your husband's family. Speak of your distress only to your husband, no one else. Love and serve him." To the boy: "Our daughter is your wife now. If she becomes lame or blind you must take care of her. Do not enter into unnecessary feuds, or we will be ashamed to come to you. Both of you must work hard in the field." All this while the singing goes on. Here is one of the songs:

Go bena, go you must, why tarry and take time?
You are married, go you must.
Friends will go as far as the fields, brothers will
go as far as the stream;
Go bena, go you must. Why tarry and take time?

As the cart moves away, a kind of a mock attack with dust and pebbles is made on the receding party. Then the groom's party sings:

The bride weeps, and weeps the bride's brother.
You can't help it, you must take her with you.
The bride weeps, and weeps the bride's mother.
What's that to you, you must take her with you.

When the bridal couple reaches the groom's house, the two sit on a cot near the hearth. The dancers circle five times around the hearth singing.

On the ninth day, the bridegroom goes with his wife and a few relatives to visit his in-laws, when his wife's sister takes off the wedding ornaments he had been wearing for this period since the marriage. When the food is served, the groom refuses to eat, and his people tell the in-laws he will not unless he is given something precious. The in-laws promise a cow or bullock, and if the boy still persists, reduce a portion of the bride price. There are a few

minor rites which are intended to promote fertility. For instance, the couple play at shooting a cloth fish lying in a plate of water with a miniature bow and arrow. The arrow and the fish are taken as symbols of fertility.

Death

The Bhils believe that when death is about to enter a house, a creaking sound is heard, for it is Joring Padhsha coming to take away someone from the house. Sometimes, a bird is seen on the top of the house. After the death takes place, relations and friends gather around, and each pours a little liquor into the dead man's mouth saying, "Drink my share."

An elderly woman, called Harwani, a widow acting as one of the performers of the death-rites, puts on the fire, a clay cooking-vessel filled with water into which all those gathered together are put with a handful of rice saying, "If any of our dead ancestors come, give them something of this." A fowl and finally some fish is also cooked, then is tied in a piece of cloth to go into a basket placed on a new winnowing fan, and laid on the lap of the deceased man's wife or daughter. It is called petio. The Harwani then puts it outside on three stones. Nearby is also placed an empty blackened pot inside a net, and covered by a basket containing a little rice and some coins.

A near female relative goes to the stream with a new earthen pot and a sickle to which is tied a black string to bring water to bathe the deceased. On this errand, she is followed by a man carrying an axe on his shoulder. Before filling up, the woman makes on the water two intersecting cuts.

In the meantime, a small wooden plank is placed under the dead man's feet, and the hair is rubbed with curd to prepare for the bath. A dhoti or a sari is held over the body depending on the sex of the deceased as a sort of canopy called padado. New clothes and ornaments are put on the body. Each person present then puts a coin into the dead man's mouth. After this, the corpse is covered up in the canopy cloth over which women throw rice, asking the dead to give it to their own relatives. Then follows a strange scene. The partner of the dead, the husband or the wife has to lie down beside the deceased for a little while or, at least, sit beside it.

The bier is carried by four mourners while a man with a sword goes in front, the tur or musical pipe playing all through. Then a gun

is fired. When the funeral has gone 500 yards, the cot is put down, the Harwani takes away the plank from under the corpse's feet, and breaks on it two white pumpkins and a black pot. After this, the men alone go to the burning ghat, and the women go to the river or stream carrying with them the sickle, the black pot, grains, pulses, vegetables, etc. At the waterside, a small rectangular plot is marked to be divided into five parts, into which are poured the grains and the vegetables. The pot is broken, the water sprinkled and some offered to the dead by the Harwani who says, "Drink this."

At the cremation ground, the body is placed with its head to the north. The mourners sit on the cot fanning the body or holding an umbrella over it. The Harwan, male version of the Harwani, brings with him a burning cowdung cake in a black pot along with the petio and the empty pot in the net. The pyre is arranged with three fire-logs kept at a distance of about two feet from each other, and on these, the other pieces are placed to raise its height. The cot is taken five times round the pyre, then placed on it with the head again to the north. While the ceremony is going on, cows, bulls, buffaloes or whatever the person owned in life are tied near at hand, and taken away when the rites are over. It is said that when a prince was being consumed in the flames, an elephant was tied nearby.

The Harwan brings water, passes the crushed end of a tooth-stick used for cleaning the teeth over the deadman's mouth, splits it into two, waves it round his head, and throws the pieces away. He then washes the dead man's face, after which he washes his own hands. The food from the petio is taken out in two clay-lamps, and thrown away towards the feet of the corpse. The mourners then place food one by one into the Harwan's crossed hands, touch him and say, "This relative of yours feeds you. He does everything for you, and for you, he opts into indebtedness. Give him plenty, do him no harm, do not harass his cattle." The Harwan throws all food towards the corpse's feet. This is feeding the dead. A small piece is torn off from the cloth covering the deceased, and tied to a tree. Then some money is tied to the dead person's waist, everything the mourners have brought is thrown around the pyre, a pumpkin is placed near the head, some leaf-cups with rice are put at the foot with the injunction, "Eat this from us. Take some of it to our relatives who are also there." Silver coins are dropped into the mouth, and the body is covered with ornaments and even some agricultural implements. The Harwan with the fire moves from west to south, from south to east and from east to north, after

which the pyre is lit from the side of its head.

As the body burns away, the mourners move towards the stream with the Harwan giving the lead. Each picks up a handful of grass, which is all deposited in the stream. The Harwan places a maize-head with a coin and tobacco in it. After which the Harwan and the others pour water on the grass requesting the dead to drink it. They then embrace each other. The Harwan takes away the coin put there, crushes maize, but lets the tobacco leaf lie. The day after, the Harwan takes two slices of bread and an egg to the cremation place. The Harwan places the bread, egg and some tobacco in three shares. If any valuable pieces of ornament remain unburnt, they are collected by the Harwan, and put beside the stream on a head of maize.

On the third day, the Bhils of the village gather together. This is known as the Kol Padsha mandal. There the moustache and beard of close relatives are shaved. The *kotwal* invited for this special ceremony arrives with a new basket, and cooks a complete meal. This is put on leaf plates, and kept in the basket along with two bamboo tubes, one with milk, the other cow's urine, an accepted disinfectant used in purification ceremonies. The basket is then tied with a cloth, with grass over it. The *kotwal* carries the basket and four pieces of dried bark of teak, and the mourners follow him to the cremation ground. The four bark pieces are put on the four sides of the pyre, and with them, the ashes are gathered. A near relative of the dead touches the *kotwal* and says, "If anything remains to be done, tell us. We will do that, but don't trouble us." Some of the cooked food is strewn there, water poured on the ash heap and basket torn on it.

The *kotwal* then erects a small booth a foot high with a few sticks, and spreads grass on it as a thatch. Under this, he divides food into three parts, and pours milk and cow's urine in each of them. It is called building the house. The *kotwal* is paid for his services that day.

On the twelfth day, there is drinking and merry-making, beating on tom-toms, shooting arrows into the trees and singing and dancing. The relatives usually bring gifts of cloth and goat or young buffalo. For a year from then, the dead person is offered food and water twice a day out of the daily food that is cooked, as also on all festive occasions.

The Bhils commemorate a dead ancestor by a memorial stone called Gatha. This is erected in a grove consecrated to the ancestral spirits as their dwelling place called "the forest of the gods," and

protected from the axe and the plough. The memorial stone is either plain or ornamented with carvings generally showing the ancestor to advantage in heroic poses, these largely determined by the social status the person enjoyed when alive. An elaborate ritual precedes this. The stone has to be a long broad slab with a pointed head, and to be approved by the priest who officiates on this solemn occasion.

All the people of the village are invited and assemble in the grove where a pit is dug in a special place beside which is laid the stone wrapped up in a new white cloth. First, the priest goes into a trance, the spirit of the departed then announces itself, then greets the people with "Ram Ram," and accepts their greetings. The spirit starts by reminding them of their many omissions in their obligations to their gods and ancestors, and warns them of retributions. Gradually, as he calms down, he expresses his desire for a seat in the grove with offerings of food and liquor. Whereupon, the eldest in the family celebrating brings to him the stone which he accepts by sitting on it. Food and drink are offered, and the spirit shows its acceptance by pouring a few drops of liquor in his cupped palms and letting it fall on the ground twice. He then calls the head of the performing family, the village priest and the headman, and gives them three drinks each. The ceremony concludes with some animal sacrifices, by which time, the spirit is believed to have departed in contentment.

The ancestral stones lie in every village grove in clusters, each standing for the dead ancestors of a single lineage unit.

Recent Conditions

Like the rest of the tribals in India, the Bhils too have been going through great many vicissitudes. *Veth* (forced labour) was prevalent for many years amongst the tribals. In addition, there was the usual autocratic regime of the petty officials. The money-lenders added extra burdens and pressures. They were recruited and put on all kinds of jobs by the local officials, with little or no payment. This has undermined their self-confidence and made them timid. Even their bulls and carts were sometimes taken free. Not quite long ago, one used to see a Bhil train crawling up a hill, that is, a number of Bhils with a head load each, doing duty for some officers on tour.

Chapter Two

Tribalism in India

2 The Nagas of Nagaland

The Nagas consist of a number of sects, each with its own identity and language, each deserving a chapter by itself. Here, only a brief general description is given of their common characteristics which does not convey the full richness of their total life.

Habitation

The territory actually inhabited by the Nagas extends from the north-western extremity of Cachar to the border of Chittagong. They invariably chose to hoist themselves at inaccessible heights, and built villages on the summits of various hills. The character of this country consists of a succession of long parallel ridges, increasing in height to reach points upto 4,000 metres.

Origins

A number of explanations are offered for the name Naga, from the *Kachari* term meaning young warrior to the Sanskrit *Nag*, a snake. They never used this themselves as a generic term for any of the several Naga groups. The name was perhaps given to them from certain impressions formed of them by others, and it has since remained.

The Nagas have always had the reputation of being fierce and esay

with their spears. It is also true historically that the attempts made by the Rajas of Manipur, Cachar and Tripura to subjugate them proved futile.

The Nagas take delight in their weapons, which seem to be their constant companions and a proud possession, especially their battle-axe called *dao* which seems like an all-purpose implement. Their spear and shield have now become famous, and are counted among the connoisseur's items. The *dao* is quite a formidable weapon with a triangular blade about twenty centimetres long, straight at the back, ten centimetres wide at the top, narrowing towards the handle which itself is about half-metre long and gaily ornamented with tufts of coloured hair.

As Nagas are a settled community, their villages have always been comparatively much larger, some of them even according to century-old records to have as many as 500 houses. The villages perched on precipitous hills enjoy a commanding view of all the approaches, essential for security purposes. They are fortified by ditches with barricades on the inner sides of the entrance, contrived over a narrow ridge of stone and earth with precipitous sides, making the entry pret-ty tortuous. Their villages look distinguished, drained, manured and well-cultivated. For miles around one sees a succession of fine terraces of rice, a rolling country dotted with clusters of houses. The front-boards are covered with painted devices in black, maroon and white, the most popular designs being concentric circles. Amongst the Ang-ami Nagas, dolls represent men and women made out of wood or clay, suspended over this board by their armpits. The principal up-rights which project above the roof are covered with a thatch shaped like figures and so on. Knotted tree and tangled creepers form a heavy cover overhead. Each door is made out of a piece of heavy wood, stuck in the lintel of each house. When the villagers wish to keep off a visitor, they strew it with lots of twigs and leaves to obli-terate the path. This devise is also used when there is an epidemic to prevent the disease spirit from entry.

Each clan is distinguishable not only by its dialect and costume but equally by the devices on their shields, which are easily recogniz-able even at a distance. As these clans have a long history of mutual feuds, these shields must have had great significance recognizing a friend from a foe.

They always seem to move in groups, each with a conical basket secured to the back by two straps, one embracing the chest, the other

round the forehead. Usually, each carries a spear shod with a pointed ferule which seems to serve both as a friendly support and a defensive weapon. Walking in a long unbroken line, they rend the long deep silence by their characteristic cry "hoi, hau" which also echoes when they are working.

Like all tribals, the Nagas are also divided into sub-clans. But instead of each of these being settled in certain specified areas, they are distributed through all the villages. Thus, a single village can have two or three of these sub-clans, khels as they are called by the Nagas. Each khel dwells within a heavily-walled area. They have a long history of khel feuds and rivalries, accentuating the isolation of each. An important thing to bear in mind is that the Naga unit is really khel, not a village.

The cry of "hoi, hau" the Nagas indulge in, can hardly be described in words, so shrill and long-sounding it is with several variations. It not only serves to break the monotony of their daily labours but is also used for intercommunity contacts. A large group from one village can visit a neighbouring village and make a real ceremony of raising this cry as paying a compliment to the village or an individual they have chosen to honour. This tribute is recognized, and in return, some gifts offered to them. The party may consist of fifty or more, and the cry itself may run into a lengthy volume ending with a harsh prolongation of "hou".

The morung, bachelor's house, is perhaps the most important among structures, for it houses a vital and significant institution. What one sees is mostly a wide roof springing from a small back-gabled wall of bamboo. The ridge rises rapidly about twenty-five to thirty feet (eight to ten metres) from this to the front, while the eaves rest on the ground on either side. The front is closed in with a semi-circular wall of thatch, only a small door giving admission, and is rather dark. The house is divided into three parts by a low wall of wooden logs covered by a thick bamboo mat. One side has a hearth with sleeping apartments with planked beds like berths in a ship. The front verandah, enclosed at the sides, is used as a visitors' room, then a large room opening in a small back verandah with a fireplace and plank seats around it, and floored with immense hollowed beams as a parlour room.

These structures are much more elaborately carved and decorated than any of the houses. Figures of elephants, deers, tigers, birds, fishes as well as geometrical designs are painted on the weather-

boards. On some, life-size figures of men and women with elaborate tattoo marks on their limbs, or dot-lines or circles are depicted on the principal uprigths. The back verandah with its low circular roof has war and hunting trophies hung on its walls. It is said that one time skulls captured in war also used to be hung here. The big drum beaten with two clubs is also kept here, which is sounded to bring people together or give warnings. It played a strategic role in the days when warfare was a more common occurrence.

The morung is one of the most important Naga community institutions. It is popularly accepted that the condition of the morung indicates the state of the village. A well-maintained morung means a healthy and well-going village. A dilapidated morung means a decaying village. It is here (morung) that the foundations of each generation are laid, moulded and built up. The growing youth is taught the meaning and significance of traditions, told of the valour and heroic deeds of the earlier generations and that it is in the glory of the past that the seeds of the future have to sprout.

The boys are sent to the morung when they are still small, around six. Here, they learn to fit into the larger community life, to know their duties towards a larger family and, in course of time, fulfil larger responsibilities. The younger boys learn to serve the older ones, assume tasks to serve the morung, roughing out in a group, moulding them to make difficult adjustments. The rougher elements are hammered into moderation, for, otherwise, they are open to chastisement and ridicule. For bad behaviour, a severe punishment may also be given. The training also reduces the tensions between the old and young generations, in short, fulfilling a variety of functions. It is a kind of a club for the young people where they learn to sing community songs, dancing, ornamentation, decoration. At one time, when tribal wars were common, it served also as an armoury. It is still a sanctuary and no man seeking shelter there can be touched, regardless of the charge against him. He has in fact to be protected until the clan elders can review his case and settle it. No property in a morung can be stolen, for it is taboo. Newcomers are treated with special consideration.

It was inevitable that the morung should incur the condemnation of the Baptist mission which put a ban on it as a "heathen" institution without trying to understand its social implications. This was a big blow to the Naga community life which began to lose one of its most powerful community foundations with its psychological

consequences. The Baptist Church with its huge finances and the political power it derived from the support of the British-Indian Government could exercise considerable pressure.

Story of Creation

The Nagas believe that in the beginning the earth was covered by a vast sheet of water, towered over by a hill where lived the God Sibrai. One night, a giant bat kept flying round to find a spot to land. Finally, it flew to God Sabrai and told him that he came from another world which had got overpopulated and to look for new land to relieve its congestion. The bat was, in reality, a god who had assumed the bat's form to be able to fly around. Thereupon Sabrai created land, trees, grass and the wind to blow. Crows scraped the earth and made rivers flow through the land. Then birds, animals and finally man were placed on this land.

Each species had its own king, and each creature entrusted with a special task, like the wagtail guarding rivers.

When the bird assembly was to meet and birds were rushing to the place, an owl accosted a hornbill and begged the latter to hide it under its wing—"I am old and ugly, and will not find favour with the assemblage." The hornbill did so. He was first chosen the king for his imposing beak. But he was so flurried with excitement that he dropped the owl from under his wings, the sight of which so repulsed the assembly that he was ultimately rejected. Then Bhimraj, the king-crow, was chosen instead. Even though the hornbill lost its title to kingship, it is nevertheless held in great reverence for it is regarded as a favourite of the gods, although they do, on occasions, shoot and eat it as a great delicacy. Many of their songs are also on this bird and their feathers form a precious adornment.

At first, all men were one, latter they broke up. It happened this way. The king had a daughter named Sitoyle. She was extraordinarily fleet-footed and her long wanderings in the jungles worried her parents. One day she could not be traced. The search party, while looking for her, found instead a monster python with a bloated stomach. So the men attacked it with an axe and dao, and as they struck, their physical appearance began to change while breaking into different kinds of speech. Those speaking the same tongue formed a different group, and each drew apart from the other.

Origin of the Earthquake

Once when a great Raja died, he went to the abode of gods and married Sabrai's daughter there. This gave him ideas, and he tried to set himself up as a rival to Sabrai. So, a wrestling contest was held to resolve the issue. When the result seemed to hang in balance, the Raja's wife in sympathy with her father, managed to tie up her husband's legs with her hair holding him helplessly to the ground. The agreement between the two contestants was that the vanquished would be confined to the middle of the earth. Whenever the internee struggles to free himself from his confines, the earth gets a big jolt. An earthquake to the Nagas is also an omen, for if it occurs early morning or late evening, it is considered unlucky, if it is later in the day, it signifies good omen.

Religion and Rituals

A certain section of the Nagas of Nagaland now follow the Christian religion. Nevertheless, a substantial lot of them still cling to the old faith. Moreover, among the tribals, the dividing line between the two is fairly thin.

The ancient Naga religion seems fairly simple. They are free from too much preoccupation with religion. The Christian missionaries find it hard going, for religion holds little interest or attraction for these people.

They believe in a supreme being, the creator, kindly and benevolent who demands no propitiation. They also believe in the existence of spirits whom they fear and propitiate. They have no established form of worship, no temples and no hierarchy of priests. The fact that they bury the dead in good clothes, and keep beside the corpse various kinds of food and liquor, proves that they believe in life after death. Some of them do have a pantheon, the following being its important members—the two benevolent ones are Semo, the god of riches, and Kuchimpai, the god of harvest, who also rules over the general affairs of men. Then there are the malicious ones, like the ungaily Rupfabu, a Cyclops with an eye in the middle of his forehead, to whose displeasure are ascribed all human misfortunes, and his assistant Kanganiba, who is completely blind! It is believed that when a bird is sacrificed to the latter, he appraises the bird by the amount of space it occupies. So, usually the bird is put in a big basket and

as the deity feels the large dimension of the basket, it gets pleased.

Rituals

The observance of genna is common to all the Nagas. Genna is used to mean two things—abstaining from work either because of a festival or because of the occurrence of some unusual thing, usually a catastrophe. It also means something forbidden. A genna may be applicable to a whole village, or be confined to a khel or even an individual household. In the first two, all work in that area naturally stops. Nothing can be taken out or brought in. This also applies to people, so visitors are taboo. A household comes under genna when a child is born or even an animal gives birth to young ones. Genna is also a special form of worship to propitiate some spirits.

The Sekrengi genna which falls on the second day of the full moon in February marks the commencement of the working year. It has prevention of illness in the coming year as one of its objects. It begins as do all gennas by taking little rice and a make-believe cooking, putting it on fire for a moment, which is wrapped up afterwards in a plantain leaf and together with a small leaf cup of dzu, tied to the central post of the partition-wall between the two main rooms of the house. This is followed by a visit on part of all men to the village spring where they wash themselves, their clothes and tools in fresh water which is carefully guarded from the previous day to prevent defilement. On return, there is killing of an unblemished cock which is carefully watched for auspicious and inauspicious signs. Each killer must light his own fire with the fire-stick and not from any other spark as from matches. Here too a careful watch is kept for omens. For instance, if the spark rises from the right of the stick, it is taken as good for men, if to the left, it is favourable for women. The cock is then eaten. The Sekrengi genna has other significance too. For instance, boys who can kill their own cocks, rid themselves of their mothers' apron-strings, and join their own fraternity.

During the first two days of the Sekrengi genna, all men are genna, that is, under a prohibition which applies even to communication. They have to keep away from women, even eat separately. So severe is this segregation that the latter cannot even draw water for men. On the fourth day, young men don their ceremonial clothes and proceed to the jungle to fetch pith, sticks and wood from which they make very large-sized traditional type of bead necklaces worn by men

These are strung and stored up in a convenient house which is called the Ka Ki where they assemble in the evening to sing.

It is also customary during this period for the youngmen to go out in the jungle with pellets and bows to catch birds, lizards, mice which are later tied to long bamboo poles and displayed before their houses. This too is an omen and the following year's signs are read at this gathering.

To commemorate this feast, huge stones are dragged, often for long distances on rough wooden sledges, to be erected by the road-side. The man who performs the ceremony also qualifies to put over his house the huge wooden horns which are a common feature of these villages. The entire village becomes strictly genna, and for the first five days work of any sort is forbidden as also contacts and movements.

The Thehrangi Genna

The Thehrangi is a harvest festival and celebrated on the completion of the harvest and marks the end of the working year. This celebration has singing aad dancing as one of its chief features. The participants are generally young unmarried boys and girls or if married have no children. On the second day of the celebration, they all turn out in their ceremonial dress and gather in the Ka Ki. The girls and boys then range themselves on opposite sides of the trestle, start pounding grain and singing special songs. Later, they go round the courtyard of the house in a procession, the boys with mithun horns and the girls with leaf cups. It is headed by a man who holds aloft a veteran's spear from which the iron head has been removed, and instead, a pointed plantain leaf substituted, probably to prevent accidents. The rear is brought up by a young man with a pair of horns ornamented with human hair as are the warrior's shields. Then the two are tied together and carried over the shoulder. The party then proceeds to the stone-built common hall, a sitting place, used to dance and sing, men usually doing the singing. The concluding part is also ceremoniously done. For this, two girls are specially picked. Sometimes, other clan parties from villages around also join the group.

The dancing on this occasion is performed by moving round in circles solemnly as in a procession with the lines sometimes splitting into two in opposite directions. The girls by partnering boys, get into

their circle. The parties eventually wind up in the Ka Ki. After an evening break, the dance starts again. Men arrive first and occupy two long benches placed at two ends of the big front room lit with a fire in the centre, sitting very close together holding a mithun horn of rice-beer in the right hand with the arm resting on the right knee. But the beer is not drunk.

When the girls turn up, they sit along the two sides of the room, leaving passage along the side where the doors open out, keeping their eyes lowered in apparent modesty. Men and women sing their own songs. In some cases though, the singing is in alternate verses and goes on for all the three days of the festival. A pecularity however, is of carrying platters of pork sprinkled with salt in the procession which is given only to the newly married girl taking part. The pounding of rice definitely connects it with promotion of fertility of the crops, but extended to families also. Hence participation of newly married couples.

Song sung at the Thehrangi genna (resowing seedlings):

From youth let there be no parting.
I will wait by the path to watch; I gaze at the fairest one from afar. When her hair is long and bound up, let her remain my friend and go with me. Then I will wait for her at dawn. I will take her beyond the others. I will return alone by way of Soroz-hu. Then I am lonely by myself. Send her word of it.
On our favourite path through the village, after death we can treat it no longer,
By the stone of *ketsorr* (a memorial stone),
Let us pluck off heads of grass and caress one another,
Thus I shall possess her, we will put our cups into one gourd,
We will go ahead of the spiteful, we will not hide our love.
If we do not go to the fields together, men will remark on it.
Whether we do or do not, they will accuse us.
Don't be angry with me, *Pesekriewu* (grazing ground)

The following songs are sung only in the jungle:

When we go into jungle, hide no word,
To speak all that is in the heart and be friends, is well.
We have never been in the forest together.

I have never plucked wild herbs to fill my love's basket, for this I am sad.

Man sings: Do not tease a girl, when her hair is grown, she will no longer be my friend.
Woman sings: Whether I don't come back and be your friend after my hair is grown you wait and see.
Man sings: Seeds are in the earth and keep falling thereto. They take them away but they still spring up. If man dies he riseth not again.
Woman sings: Girls delay not too long (to marry)
When your hair grows long, you will grow old; when that cometh to pass life is at end.
Man sings: The Moon waneth and waxeth again
When I have lost my beloved, there is no more meeting.

THE THEZUKEPRU

This genna is rather different from others. It is marked by the throwing off a field rat, known as "telling off the rat." On the festival eve, young men catch a mouse called Zukrano which they shut inside a section of a bamboo placed outside the morung. Young men assemble there in the evening to choose from amongst themselves the one who is to "throw" the mouse. The mouse, when it is taken out of the bamboo, has its ears pierced and cotton wool stuffed into the holes. The man selected for the task strips himself and, with the mouse placed in his hand, runs through the village, climbs to a height and then throws it away down the village path directing it to go to some remote village. While he is running, the thrower is joined by a number of other boys to run along with him, picking up sticks to beat the ground, singing and shouting. The thrower after getting rid of the mouse, runs back to the morung, climbs on to the *machan* (a raised platform used for sleeping) and has got to stay there for twenty-four hours.

In the meantime, the entire village has got involved in this simple but complicated task. When the boys get ready to make the run with the mouse-thrower, a call is given to the cornermost house in the village, but no one goes out of it. The cue is, however, taken up by all men and women of the village who stamp and shout inside their

houses as though driving away mice. On that day, no one can eat or drink. Even if one were in the middle of doing so, it has to be abandoned once the shout is heard. The next day is called Thezukepu, and the village is under genna, and nobody can pick vegetables.

Originally, the Nagas were roughtly divided for convenience into two groups—the kilted and the non-kilted, though ethnically it may not be realistic, for the former embrace only the *angamis* (unconquered) who undoubtedly can be marked out from their physical appearance and dress to their mode of cultivation. Into the other are clubbed together all the other Naga groups. Some Nagas have a series of distinctive clothes by which the social status of a man is recognizable. There is, for instance, a very special fabric, white with red and black border which a man may wear in virtue of the several gennas he has performed. The Naga costume is amongst the most colourful and decorative. Each group has its own special styles for men and women with equally elaborate ornamentation. The infinite details of almost each defy description, if one is to do justice to them.

The ceremonial dress of today is really a symbol of warfare of the bygone days, in short, signifying the prowess of the heroes in love and war. Just as at one time the breast ornament obviously signified having overcome an adversary, while each of the hornbill feathers worn on the head stood for every enemy, hands and leggings on the legs, all signified some such feat in a warfare, a sign of those who had been downed. Similarly, the armlets and the gauntlets on the little figures worn on the back. A man's figure represented upside down may mean that the enemy was beaten by a ruse.

What is astonishing is how these old warriors went into pitched battles wearing these elaborate costumes said essentially to impress the opponents and strike fear, if possible. Many of these special symbols have currently lost their significance. Some continue to be worn without pretence to claims, while others have faded.

Dragging stones over great distances is a famed institution of Nagas. The stone may be in commemoration of a genna or even a tomb. This is done in a kind of a sledge formed out of a forked tree on which the stone is levered, and then carefully lashed with canes and creepers, to which even a hundred or more men may attach themselves in a long line, and pull by putting rollers underneath. A hole is dug and one end of the stone made to slide into it and stand in position. Leaves are then placed on top of it and liquor poured,

followed by a feast.

Dance

Dance is almost a passion with the Nagas. For this is an occupation which seems to call forth into action the most active elements in their nature. One may perhaps say that Naga dances are imitations of some action, and no matter how mundane, they are made most exciting. That is what makes them so expressive and intimate. The war dance is the most characteristic of their dance mood and styles in movement. This dance is performed by the men alone, with spear and hatchet in hand, all the battle-movements are made, the advance, wielding of weapons, the retreat, the offensive to accompaniment of battle cries. Here the women move only in an inner circle in slow steps, whilst the men holding up their weapons in their hands dance boisterously, singing some kind of wild melodies, indulging in perpendicular jumps and side leaps.

Crafts

The Nagas are the most dexterous and versatile in beautifying almost every single article they use in their daily life. Very characteristic of the Nagas is their drinking vessel. The commonest ones are made of mithun bone or from other wild animals. These are attractively coloured, especially where the black from the lower half merges into the transparent yellow at the top. Buffalo horns too are converted into drinking vessels.

Some are also of bamboo and wood, ingeniously contrived. A popular one is a tall and straight bamboo, shaved thin towards the top and the bottom, leaving a thick body in the middle. It is provided with a handle of plaited cane fixed with small holes drilled on its side with the non-heated side of the spearhead, or with the iron butt of the spear heated in fire, or with a rough drill made of an iron point set vertically at the end of a straight handle which is rolled between two palms. These are extremely well and carefully made.

Other items in the same line are wooden spoons of various shapes, some with flat and others with hollow cone-shaped bowls. The handles are ornamented with patterns cut into the wood. The rings or notches cut at the bottom also signify their special role on occa-

sions, as for instance, their presentation to the bride by the bridegroom. The cone-shaped as well as the long flat narrow bowls are used for drinking the ordinary rice-beer. Spoons with flat bowls are for eating.

Another item made from wood is the wooden platter. The platters are of various sizes and made in different patterns. The small saucer-like ones are used for holding appetiser dishes, while the larger ones are for eating. A popular one is the round four-legged one scooped out of a single piece of wood, and ranges from six to eighteen inches. Another type is wound round with a fibre rope and the two ends are pulled to make it revolve and then cut circular. The top is hollowed by being turned against a stone with apertures cut at the foot. Often, these dishes are merely shaped with a dao.

Other articles of interest in daily use are the basket work dishes. They are usually made with little wooden support to stand on. These are also used for holding appetiser items like salted beans which go with drinking rice-beer. It is an interesting sight to see each holding the basket dish as well as the long bamboo cup in the left hand at these rice-beer drinking gatherings, with the right hand left free. Then there are larger baskets, narrow at the bottom and swelling towards the top, covered with a pointed cover, called Jappas. These are used for keeping clothes and other household articles. Water is carried in bamboo tubes as well as in narrow-necked earthenware jars.

Though these articles are of mundane use, great skill, fine aesthetic taste and delicate work is painstakingly bestowed on each item. Most of them are original and peculiar to them and real connoisseur objects.

Weapons

The universal weapon of the Nagas is the javelin, usually adorned with coloured hair and decorated with strips of ratan of various colours. Different versions of these weapons are used by several Naga tribes. The interesting point to note is their total rejection of the bow and arrow, so intimate a part of tribal life elsewhere. The weapons are also ceremonial, and therefore, ornamented. Spears carried by young men have the shaft covered with an elaborate and tightly fitting cover of fine plaited cane for the background, work being in red and the patterns yellow. The ordinary warrior has to wear a spear covered with red hair half down the shaft, after which patterns in black,

white and red hair succeed for another foot or so. But a veteran warrior is entitled to carry a spear entirely covered with long hair or having a long head and an iron spike coming almost up to the base of the head, leaving only a foot or so of hair covered over to form the shaft. There are also other patterns in spears. The eastern Angami warriors used in ceremonial spears heads with a shank adorned by a number of purely ornamental barbs cut from solid metal. The number of barbs, regular and bilateral, are supposed to vary according to the martial achievements of the warrior.

However, the ordinary spear is made of plain light wood, the shaft being four to five feet in length, and even though the shape may vary, it is so devised as to afford a protecting check to the sharpened edge of the blade, obviously to prevent its slipping through and hurting the hand. The spearhead narrows above this check, and swells out gradually into a broad leaf-shaped blade, longer than those used by other tribes. It has no mid-rib. All spears are tipped at the butt with an iron spike for sticking into the ground to rest, for it is never left leaning against the wall; indoors it is hung up. Both the head and butt contain sockets into which the shaft is shifted without any glue for binding or rivets. The spears don't have any sheaths, and are carried slanting on the right shoulder when not in use.

Its counterpart is the shield made from the hide of the rhinoceros, elephant or buffalo, and is generally 5 to 5½ feet, sometimes even 7 feet, starting with 2½ feet at the top and narrowing to 18 inches at the bottom. It is suspended by a rope going over the right shoulder and controlled by a small horizontal cane handle set low inside the shield. For ceremonial purposes, however, a lighter shield made of bamboo matting is used. Young people cover theirs with black patterns such as of mithun horns and a concentric circle supposed to symbolize the sun, moon, etc. While the older men cover theirs with skins of animals such as bear or leopard, fastened with bamboo slivers. Veterans used to ornament theirs with heads and figures cut out of bear skin, and the open spaces of bamboo matting covered with red goats' hair wedged into the intersections, the whole sometimes having a border of bear-skin all round. They also have a strip of hide down the centre of the back. From the upper corners of the ceremonial shields spring two long cane-horns, two to three feet in length, ornamented with tresses of human hair, while from the centre rises a tall thick plume of about the same length made of thick goats' hair dyed scarlet, two thirds of the way up, but left white at the top. In the case of ceremo-

nial ones, they may be cut into two concave curves, run a fringe of white down, and the rear edge be adorned with a string of tassels made of leather of the peacock-pheasant, cock, blue jay, green parrot, etc., wrapped at the base in a bunch of white down. With the shields of young people, the horns are made of plain white wood without hair.

Chapter Two

Tribalism in India

3 The Agarias of Madhya Pradesh

The word Agaria comes from Ag—fire, derived probably from Agni, the Hindu god of fire, and Agyasur, the tribal demon born in a flame. The Agarias are the iron smelters and blacksmiths of central India, and one of the most fascinating among the tribals. They are most numerous in the Maikal Hall, but are generally spread over a wide area of Madhya Pradesh. The basic factor which links the Agaria to a tradition dating back perhaps between 2000 and 1000 B.C. or may be even earlier, is not only his antiquity of which the Agaria is justly proud, but also the continued high excellence of his handiwork. If we can bring to mind the astounding quality of the pillar at Kutab Minar, which is estimated as 3,000 years old, we may admit that iron of that period attained a rare finesse, especially if we are lucky enough to see a metal mirror which makes us wonder at such achievements.

Because of their special profession, the Agarias come more into touch with the outside—the non-tribal world—than many others of their kind. They have a proud saying: "If you think iron is nothing, look out of your house and see it wandering all over the three worlds."

Here is a touching song on their relationship with iron:

What cares the bellows blower for the date of the cinders,

O Agaria, O bellows blower, you make no dlstinctions,
For you put into the same fire the same fine sword and the roughest oxhead or sickle."

Here is a touching Agaria Kurma song where the iron is talking to man :

"O, they will carry you away and your soul will weep."
The hammer says: "Listen O Agaria, do not make me.
Tomorrow or the day after, you will die, then who will use me to strike the iron?
O they will carry you away and your soul will weep."
The pick says: "Listen O Agaria do not make me,
Tomorrow or the day after you will die and I shall be used to dig your grave.
They will carry you away and your soul will weep."
Who makes the bangles? Who makes the spade?
O parrot O: who makes the sword?
The Agaria makes the bangles, the Agaria makes the spade.
O Parrot O: The Asur makes the sword.
How shall we sell the bangles and the spade?
O Parrot O: how shall we sell the sword?
For rupees five we sell the bangles and the spade.
O Parrot O: for rupees ten the sword."

The Asur, also called Mahali Asur, because they extract mail (slag) from iron. From these have sprung several smaller groups like Mahali Agaria, Mahali Lohar, Jharia Lohar, each with some distinguishing mark. While Mahali Asur women wear coloured saris, others do not because of taboo on colours like red and yellow; some wear nose rings, others cannot. Some wear glass bangles, others can only wear grass ones. However, they all have one common mark—very close tattooing. In fact, it is so heavy that it is sometimes talked of as a substitute for clothes.

Iron-mongering was once quite widespread and found in every district away from the riverine tracts. These people seemed ready to work with any ore available, and since very little existed at the time in the way of alloys, the iron workers evidently had to concentrate on producing very high-quality metal. Indeed, the renowned iron of that time calls for a special study of its own. Verrier Elwin, who through

his deep interest in tribal affairs delved into this, has revealed some fascinating facts. Historians as well as students of Indian arts and crafts have dilated upon the excellence of old Indian steel, coveted at the time by the then known world, particularly the more enlightened Roman world. It is a significant fact that these territories, which had abundant iron supplies of its own, nevertheless sought steel from India. The Arabs of Damascus used Indian steel for making their famous blades. Though very much on the decline, the little clay furnaces still continue to persist to this day, partly because of the Indian tillers' preference for tools made from the softer malleable ores. They find them easier to handle or mend, and also more rust-resistant.

Origin

Bhagwan first made the world by laying a great lotus leaf on the face of the water. But the sun came up and made it wither. He then made a world of lac, but when he climbed on it, it broke into a thousand pieces. Finally, he made from the dirt of his breast, a crow, and allowed it to suck his milk $2\frac{1}{2}$ times, saying: "Now you have drunk my milk you will never starve nor thirst; you and I will search the earth together." So he sped off into the air. The crow kept flying till it became exhausted and said to himself: "My father is my enemy. He made me only to kill me." The crow fell on the Kekramal Chhatri, the crab, which took him down below the water, and found Nal Raja and Rani who had been sleeping for the last twelve years. Chhatri shook them, and though the Raja insisted he did not have the earth, Chhatri persisted and finally squeezed his throat till it vomited out earth in little balls. The crow then took this earth back to his father who then made the world.

It was, however, found that the earth was unsteady. So bhagwan went to Kekramal, the crab who brought Nanga Baiga out of its right side and Nanga Baigin from its left, saying: "These two will worship earth as their goddess and fix it in place with nails." So god created Agar Sai from the dirt rubbed from his skin, and gave him all implements to set up a smithy to make nails. But when Agar Sai blew his bellows, iron did not flow, only sparks flew out from which appeared a girl. God said this is Tilmati, and if she blows the bellow, the virgin iron needed for your nails will flow." Then the girl blew the bellows and iron appeared, out of which five great pillars were

made—four for the corners and one for the middle. Nanga Baiga drove the nails into the pillars, and the earth was steadied.

Origin of the Agaria

First there were Raja Logundi and Rani Tingamati, ruler of Lohirgargh in the hills of Dharagaon in the old Udaipur State of Raipur district in Madhya Pradesh. It was the golden age of the Agarias, and they were supposed to possess supernatural powers. To Agar Sai's son, Sobar Sai, god had given the city of Lohripur—city of blacksmiths. It was twelve miles by twelve miles and the road was made of iron plates. So when Sabar Sai's twelve sons blew the bellows, the roads glowed red. They would drink the glowing liquid iron like rice water.

Annades (god of grain) had hid in the jungle, hence a twelve-year famine had descended on the earth. The food bhagwan had in store would last for $2\frac{1}{2}$ years. But everyone saw Raja Logundi alone did not need the grain. "He must surely be greater than I am," he ruminated to himself and fell asleep. He had a dream where he saw Raja Logundi eating iron. He was quite puzzled as to how to deal with such a man. Finally, he called *Sukhi Chamarin*, the witch, to accompany him to Lohripur, for she promised to cool the hot iron and make the road dark and cold. God disguised as a beggar to Raja Logundi's younger brother and asked for food. He brought out a dish with a pile of iron bars and shavings, glowing fierce red. As this was virgin iron, *Sukhi Chamarin* could not exercise any power over it. So bhagwan asked for some water to wash his hands before eating. The young man was bewildered, and wanted to know what this washing was for. Bhagwan showed great anger and said: "It is filthy not to wash, so wash and bring some water for me." Of course, it was just a trick to get the young iron-consuming man to touch water, for that would make his body lose the power which enabled him to eat iron. Bhagwan then continued to play this trick on each of the Raja's brothers, until he confronted Raja Logundi himself who sat on a big iron chair. At the beggar's request, the Raja himself went to fetch water, and immediately the beggar disappeared. Now all the twelve brothers sat down to eat, and first blew the bellows to heat the iron. But when they tried to swallow the bars, they died of scorching. But a young wife who was with her child had taken only a little of the iron, and therefore, was overcome less by the burning, and survived.

She ran to a Gond's house and jumped into the butter-milk kept there. As the Gond gave protection to the Asur mother, the Asurs became indebted to the Gonds.

The sun is regarded as an adversary by the Agarias. So intense is this antagonism that there is a taboo on working with iron under the sun. So many a kiln is set up to face west so that the direct rays are minimized. It is believed that if the sun falls directly, the kiln will burst or the metal produced become brittle or lose shape. The common sayings are, "Midday iron is always useless," "The shadow of the sun spoils the iron." The belief is that the sun was originally a plate of hot iron surrounding Lohripur, which was lifted by god and set up in the sky to shine there. The sun is, therefore, really a piece of iron. But due to a war between the Agaria brothers and the sun, the great city of Lohripur was destroyed. This is how it happened.

Once the sun went to Raja Logundi at Lohripur. But as the sun approached, the houses turned to ashes. Raja Logundi beseeched the sun to spare them. "I admit I am less than you are." But the sun would not heed his appeal and smote him with all his rays. Raja Logundi in shame and rage cursed the iron that had betrayed him. "Before the sun you will always have to bend." And he breathed his last.

His son, Jwala Mukhi, used to hunt with other boys in the jungle, and when they killed a prey, the boys would shout: "Good for father." But Jwala Mukhi would say: "Good for mother." The boys kept teasing him, and once declined to eat with him as he had no father. Jwala Mukhi, very humiliated, demanded an explanation from his mother. She told him of the destruction suffered by Raja Logundi and his people: "So son, you have no father." Jwala Mukhi then asked her for the sun's habitation. She replied: "Beyond the seven seas and six rivers live the sun and the moon. Everyday at dawn they play with sand on the shore of the great ocean." That night he prepared a giant lump of *Kuari Loha*, virgin iron, from which he fashioned an iron net and cage, the size of a seven-storied house. He took from his mother food for seven years. "In the thirteenth year will I return," he assured his mother.

He went east crossing seven seas and sixteen rivers until he came to the great ocean where he hid in the sand. When the sun came in the morning to play with the moon, Jwala Mukhi caught it as he would catch a fish and shut it up in his cage. Then darkness descen-

ded on the whole world and everyone ran about looking for the sun but with no success. Then blind Pawan was asked to make a search. He managed to creep in through a tiny crack in the cage and found the sun, and released him. When the sun came out and confronted Jwala Mukhi, they cursed each other. Cursing Jwala, the sun said: "All the wealth you earn will disappear like ash." That is why, it is said, that the Agarias stay poor.

Jwala Mukhi's brothers and sisters had, in his absence, set out to work. Some got bullocks and ploughed, some made baskets, some opened shops and began trade. But when Jwala Mukhi arrived, he said to them: "This is not your work, please stop it." They got offended and went to their mother to ask what they should do. "We are children of iron and our work is iron," she told them. "Your father had an iron pit on Nanga Pahar, go there and dig." So the twelve brothers went there and hunted in vain. Finally, Jwala Mukhi shot his red arrow which fell exactly where the pit was. The brothers were afraid to go down. So Jwala Mukhi himself had to go. In the pit were piled all the smithy equipment and tools, anvil, tongs, bellows, etc., made by Raja Logundi. In their midst sat Lohasur with eyes shut looking most disconsolate, for no one had sought or worshipped him over the years. Jwala Mukhi then patted him saying: "Wake up and open your eyes." As he opened his eyes Lohasur cried out: "I am hungry, why should I not eat you?" Jwala Mukhi retorted: "If you do that who is there to worship you?" Lohasur replied: "You shall be my first worshipper. You must give me plenty to eat and, in return, I will give you all these tools. But where can I get food in this pit," he asked Jwala Mukhi, who promptly offered half his own body. To which Lohasur said: "You will have to cut up your own body." So Jwala Mukhi struck at himself with an axe but the body would not sever. One drop of blood that fell, Lohasur licked it up and was satisfied. "I am full," he declared. "I need no more."

Jwala picked up all the tools, but as he touched them, each of them turned to earth. Lohasur shouted: "Stop. I have a sister who is not fed. That is why everything turns to dust." At his call, Koelasur came and Jwala touched her feet for her blessings. She told him: "Ask your brothers to bring me a black cow that has not calved." His brothers came with the offering, but Koelasur said: "If I leave the pit, you will never get your iron. So throw the cow down to me." Then Jwala picked up all the implements. The bellows had the upper part of leaves stitched together while the lower was of mud. A black

goat and twenty-one kinds of cock were sacrificed to Lohasur. To Koelasur, a black cow was offered.

They set out to work but the bellows would not work. Then Lohasur said: "Pawan Daseri (wind) at the mouth of the bellows is hungry. Give him a black hen." But when the air came, the leaf cover broke and they got frightened. But Lohasur assured them: "Give Dhahu Dhukana a black goat and the bellows will mend themselves," which they did. After this they worked for eight days and nine nights, but the coal remained dark and cold. Once again Lohasur came: "You must give a black virgin she-goat to Koelasur, then the coal will turn red. With her lives Dhua Dharni, give him a black chicken." When this was done, the furnace turned hot.

But they still hammered the iron with their fists. So bhagwan said they will never want hammer and tongs because of this, and cursed them. Then the bellows burst and they could not work anymore. They appealed to Lohasur, but he remained silent. Suddenly, bhagwan came disguised as a Gond with a sickle he wished to sharpen. They narrated their woes to him. He readily made a wooden frame for the bellows and got them to supply the skin of a black cow to cover it. As they were working, a wood pecker, *tak-taki*, as they call it, sat pecking at the wood. This is how it is said they learnt to devise and use a hammer on an anvil. Then a dog came and sat before the forge with its fore feet crossed. That is how they got the idea of iron pincers.

Here is a story to explain why the Bagh Agaria, Tiger *Sept*, will not wear bangles. A Baiga and his wife were gathering food in a forest when a woman gave birth to a baby boy. While returning, the woman could not keep pace with the man because of the baby in her arms. The man kept shouting, asking her to hurry up. But she pleaded: "I can't with a baby in my arms." He rephlied : "What is the use of a boy anyway. We shall have to pay bride price for him. You leave him here and hurry along." So she left him. A tiger and tigress heard that child cry. The tigress embraced him and fed him her milk. When he grew up, he asked for a bow and arrow. So the tiger picked up a young Agaria and brought him to its cave and made him prepare a dozen bows and arrows. When the tiger was about to release him, the former enjoined one thing on the man: "Your wife's bangles have been broken because you are taken to be dead. Don't try to put new ones on her. But if you must, do so in my name." But by the time he got home, he forgot about it and just put new bangles on her. The

tiger's foster son used to bring very nice food for the tiger. The tiger, in gratitude, caught a Baiga princess and married her to the boy and she would cook tasty meals for the tiger family. One day, the girl heard the tiger tell the tigress: "If the food she cooks smells so nice, how delicious would be her own flesh." They immediately took fright and ran away, and came to an Agaria's house where they hid themselves. The tiger tracked them down. Here the tiger saw the Agaria's wife with new bangles and asked in anger: "Why was this not done in my name as I had asked?" and snatched the Agaria.

The twelve Asur brothers blew their bellows working day and night, eating iron and drinking the slag like rice water. But the heat this generated dried up all the water, grass, and fodder. Bhagwan became concerned for his two horses, Ankhraj and Pankhraj, who began to wither fast. So bhagwan sent his white crow messenger to tell the Asurs and Asurins to work only by day and not by night. The Asur asked: "Who is this bhagwan. We are bhagwan. We are the rulers." After which they caught hold of the crow, blackened him with charcoal and sent him back. When bhagwan learnt of this, he sent *Dichua*—king crow. But the Asur not only blackened it but divided its tail into two with his pincers. So finally bhagwan changed himself into an old man covered with sores. To everyone who passed by, he said: "Keep me as your servant." But everyone rejected. At last one old widow accepted him. Then bhagwan stopped the furnace from operating, so no iron flowed. Then they went to the old man (bhagwan in disguise) who said a man must be prepared to step into the furnace, and be burnt. But nobody was willing. So he offered himself. When he went in the furnace, the Asur operating it plastered it, then blew his bellows for seven days and nights. When the furnace was eventually opened, bhagwan showed up whole and radiant. The Asurs were wonder-struck to see how the old man had shed not only his sores but even his old age. Bhagwan said: "This can be done for you too." So they asked to be put into the furnace. This was done and the furnace plastered over. Only a brother and sister were left outside to blow the bellows. When the furnace was opened after seven days only bones came out. Then bhagwan enjoined on the two survivors to henceforth use the metal to make tools out of them and live by them and not live on the iron. So it has been since.

Society and Social Events

The Agaria society is divided into *septs* (gotras), goti as they call it. Great many of them are totemic, which means that the institution is guarded by sanctions rooted in the supernatural and heroic past, especially the flight from the burning city of Loharipur. There is of course a story behind each sept. Here is one. Raja Logundi's wife escaped after the Raja's disastrous encounter with the sun, and gave birth to twenty-four children. She was in labour six times and four were born at a time. The first batch was born in a big cooking pot, called Marka, so they become the Marka Sept. The second on the verandah (*parchi*) so became Parteti; third amidst gold, so Sonwain; fourth when the mother was cleaning an earthern Tulsi pot, and became Teka; fifth was in the dust (*dhur*) and was called Dhurva; sixth at sunset (*sham*) so became Syam.

The Agarias have many charming tales about bhagwan and the sun and the moon. The sun and the moon used to play together and after their marriage travel together. The moon rode on a hare and the sun on a deer for one half of the year, and on an elephant the other half. As the elephant moves slowly, the days are longer in this period of the year.

Though the iron workers are pushed rather low down on the social ladder, iron nevertheless is rated highly as a protection against witchcraft, and beneficial on important occasions like birth, marriage and death. Varieties of iron have been used in ancient medicine in India.

For the Agaria, however, it is almost the focus of his life. There is an Agaria riddle: Only once she is a virgin. Next she is an old woman. She is neither human nor animal. What is she? Iron.

This is taken to mean that the Agarias believe in the power of iron as they do in chastity. This concept is literally translated into *Kuari Loha*, virgin iron, a very special and precious form of iron. Virgin with fire as symbol is fairly universal. Virgin fire is very important for the Agaria, essential in fact in the extraction of virgin iron. Virgin fire is a freshly kindled one, as contrasted with the leavings or remnants of a burnt out one that was used for other purposes. The real kuari loha is made for very important occasions especially at firing a new furnace or starting work on a new smithy or getting ready a new habitation, above all, the lamp-stand at a wedding has to be from virgin iron. Strict rules have to be observed in the erection of a new smithy, and great precautions taken to protect it. The

Koaon chaff that is used has to be ground in a virgin grindstone, coal kindled with virgin fire. Even the charcoal is specially prepared by cutting fresh wood. The iron has also to be dug from a virgin pit. The kiln is anointed with oil and turmeric and given a festive appearance. Then certain offerings are made like a black virgin goat or pig to Lohasur, and a bottle of liquor, an axe or a *dhitori* (basket) has to be given to a *raksa* (ghost of an unmarried man), a black hen to *Dharti mata* (mother earth), and to several other spirits, foodstuff like wheat cakes. The rite is performed as follows.

A young bachelor digs in the pit and a virgin breaks up the ore lump into small pieces and pours them into the furnace to light the fire, and she herself works the bellows. As she lights, the following invocation is recited: "Go and see Raja Logunda, Udhraja Kariya Kuar, Lohasur Mata, Jwala Mukhi, Agyasur, I remember you all. I have made the furnace hollow within and there sit Kolasur and Lohasur. O mother Agyasur, care for the flame. When the virgin iron is born, I will fall at the feet of all the godlings. Help us. Let the iron come well. Let it not fail and in the third year I will give you a black pig." Some perform little rites like Hath Dena, where the hand is dipped into rice-flour water and pressed five times on the kiln.

The Agari prefers to do the smelting at night and finish by dawn, before they see anybody's face. There was once a belief that if a woman went naked to the furnace and lit the fire with flint and cotton, and if they held their breath and finished their work before dawn, the iron they produced would be virgin.

The kuari loha is preserved carefully in the form of a long rake called Kalari. It is never sold, always preserved and pieces cut from it for special purposes. They are also made into tiny nails. They are first driven into the kiln itself, the main pillar of the smithy and the bellows, then the framework of doors, pillars, grain bins, pounders, measures, etc , i.e., items of intimate and vital use in everyday life. If there is some danger from wild animals, they are driven into trees or stones around. These nails are regarded as an insurance against trouble. This metal is specially regarded as resistant against cosmic threats, such as earthquake, lightning. and driving a nail into the earth can stop its tremors.

The first person to visit the smithy after virgin iron has been prepared has to bring a little wine and a piece of cloth as gift known as *fadawar*. In return, he will receive a token piece of the precious iron.

The Agarias use the virgin iron at marriages to protect the couple. In fact, the groom is expected to keep with him throughout the ceremonies an iron betel-nut cutter or wear iron in some form on his body. Elaborate iron lamps are also used. *Chulmundri*, a wedding-ring, is made of an alloy of iron, brass and bell-metal. When the bride first enters the husband's house, she has to step over a piece of iron. Iron is also sometimes buried with the dead.

In this context, it is natural that fire should be of absorbing interest to the Agaria who regards it as his best friend. The god of fire is Agyasura or Agin Deo, and every year at *Deotham* (near Diwali) a red cock is offered to him. Great reverence is shown to the fire and there are many taboos around it. It is natural that it became the main theme in many Agaria dreams. As they were taken as born of fire, and their ancestors ate fire, it has been to them both god and servant, a comrade and friend. These lines describe their emotions about fire.

In rains, it makes us weep, in the cold, it gives us *mohinis* (love charms). In the heat, it terrifies us and wanders blazing through the jungle.

There are many tales the world over about origin of fire. Here is the Agaria version. Iron nails were needed to fix the earth to keep it steady. So Nanga Baiga, the primeval being, broke open a great stone and out of his crack came Lohasur and from the spark Agyasur, fire.

There are several taboos ringed round the smithy. One is red cloth, which it is feared may set fire to the smithy. Black may spoil iron and charcoal, for Lohasur and Kolasur are black. Yellow is dangerous too, for it is the colour of Dudh Deo, the godling of marriage, hence turmeric is used on auspicious occasions.

Closely related to the fire is coal. Here is a story of how coal came into the smithy operation. Once Rama was hit by an arrow in the chest by Ravana and fell senseless. A frightened Sita ran to Lohripur and appealed to Raja Logundi: "Send Agyasur and Lohasur and all the gods you have with half an earthen pot filled with charcoal." Logundi sent two gods with charcoal. Holding it in one hand, Sita cut off Ravana's head with the other. Agyasur and Lohasur licked up the blood. There Dhua Dharni and Kolasur were born. They asked Sita to give them a place to live. So she took them to

Raja Logundi and said: "Put these in your furnace. They will drive away the witches."

FESTIVALS

The Agarias observe Diwali a month earlier than the Hindus. It is celebrated near the forge. A small boy is laid on the mat, two men holding his arms and legs, while an old Agaria woman lightly touching the boy's stomach a dozen times or so with a heated sickle. For little babies, a gourd is placed over the stomach and the sickle applied over it. This gourd is then taken home and hung up on the roof above where the baby sleeps. The belief is that as the gourd dries, the burn too will heal. This ritual is performed entirely by women. This is evidently done for treating stomach disturbances.

There are special incantations for the smithy worship and at the furnace they chant: "Go and see O Agyasur, O Dhua Dharni, I take refuge in you. When Lugundi and his twelve brothers blew their bellows, they did not honour you. But I honour you. O Lohasure Babu, I take refuge in you. Out of a little, bring double and then I will worship you."

And incantation asking for an increase in iron production goes like this: "Victory to Lohasur Babu. My ancestors and I rely on you. Agyasur I rely on you. Kolasur I rely on you. Our babies and children are yours. Out of little may there come much. Then I will praise and remember you."

Chapter Two

Tribalism in India

4 Arunachal Pradesh

Arunachal Pradesh lies in the extreme north-eastern snowline of India forming the border with Tibet. It has a deeply jagged skyline rising in mighty convolutions of mountain ridges and spurs. A magnificent landscape of wooded mountain slopes, cut with gorges made by torrents and rivers. The border then takes a south-eastern turn and delineates our border with Burma, following the crest of the Patkoi Hills.

Arunachal has a number of tribes. The unusual significance attached to this region is the presence of tribes professing Buddhism, of both the Mahayana and Hinayana orders. To get a more complete picture I have, therefore, selected one each from the two types of Buddhism for treatment: the Sherdukpens following Mahayana, and the Khamptis the Hinayana.

THE SHERDUKPENS OF KAMENG

Origin and History

The Sherdukpens are a small tribe following the Buddhist faith, but still steeped in the old beliefs and professions. A long story traces their arrival from Tibet. The most important role they played through

their first King, Japtang Bura, was to bring peace and harmony into a troubled region where they had now settled. This was done by amicable settlement between the warring chief through a convention of exchange of tributes such as salt, cattle and cloth. Thus a most intriguing system of communication grew up under which the Sherdukpens collected tributes from the plains people in their territory. An established authority was lent to this when the plains people referred to them (Sherdukpens) as Bhutia Raja, while the Sherdukpens referred to them as Bohotia, that is, subject people.

Notwithstanding all these discriminating epithets in use, the tributes were, however, reciprocal and not one-sided, which is rather novel. What was even more heart-warming was the fact that this was not just a dry barter. The exchanges also involved colourful ceremonials. Nor were these transactions between any two odd parties. The ties between the two parties became closely kint as they had been going on from generation to generation; these rights were being passed on from father to son as an inheritance. They involved two trips for the parties concerned, one for trade and the other to exchange blessings and bid a formal farewell. Captain Kennedy has made a special ethnological study of the different groups living along with the Sherdukpens, and he comments, "The extraordinary harmony in which people of diverse languages live is an interesting philological puzzle."

Habitation

The Sherdukpens live literally in a cluster of villages. A number of families, the heads of which trace descent from a common ancestor, form what is called a roong. This common bond is activized in all crises of life, as reciprocal help within the roong is binding. Though the village elders have powers, decisions are taken by a general consensus of people. All adults constitute what is termed as the people.

The Sherdukpens tend to scatter their hamlets, built of stone and wooden planks. The passages between them can hardly qualify to be streets, as they need to conform more to the topography of the landscape rather than to any architectural pattern. Therefore, the hamlets called *pans*, snuggle in the niches of towering hills, and stand on stone foundations, five to seven feet high, the basement being used as shelter for animals. Every village has, however, places exclusively set

apart for cultivation, hunting, etc. In these two-stroyed houses the ground floor is used for living, the upper one for storage. The bamboo doors can be bolted, but no locks are used. Their hamlets can be marked out by poles embellished by prayer flags of paper or cloth on top of the houses. An interesting item is the building in which the water-power is confined, which is pleasantly designed and beautifully decorated.

Society and Social Customs

The Sherdukpen society has a curious feature, in that it is divided into two classes—the Thongs, descendents of the noted Japtang Bura, who form a kind of aristocracy; and the Chhaos, progeny of the attendants who accompanied Bura. The Thongs dominate. Though there is no ban on interdining or friendships, intermarriage is forbidden between the two. However, there is no difference between the two. There is a curious system under which each Chhao clan is linked to a Thong clan under which the former has to perform certain tasks for the latter, which can be both highly ceremonial or just ordinary chores. At a funeral, it is taboo for a Thong to touch a corpse, while it is the duty of the Chhaos to prepare the body for the funeral.

Marriage

As boys and girls have ample opportunity to mingle, so when they decide on the mate, they exchange their sashes to show their readiness to marry. There is a custom of bringing the girl to the boy's house through a mock abduction to be kept there for three days as though forcibly, even though the groom does not stay in the same house at that time, after which she slips away. Only after this the proper ceremony takes place, when the groom's father offers to the in-laws, cows, sheep, endi cloth, etc. When the bride departs, her mother gives her a cow, an iron hearth and a scarf. Her brothers and uncles give endi silk and a whole lot of gifts. The parents of both offer scarves to the relatives. Curiously enough, the groom is not present when the rites are first performed at the bride's place, only later is she ceremoniously escorted to the groom's place. Stranger still, he is not allowed to share bed with his bride for the first ten days. It is also taboo for a father to touch his child for the first seven days after its birth.

Dormitory

The dormitory system is prevalent, but there is no separate building for it. The youths themselves organize separately from the girls in private houses, where there is extra place. A boy may visit the consenting girl of his choice with gifts at her dormitory, until they exchange sashes as a sign of betrothal.

Administration

The government representative for each village called *Goanbnra* is elected by the entire village. He holds the office at their pleasure, and can be removed by them. Where a dispute cannot be settled by discussion, the usual oaths by ordeal are resorted to. The oath can be in the form of offering a scarf to a local deity swearing: "If I am guilty, blood will ooze out of my nose in three days." If nothing happens, the complainant has to give compensation. Another form is for the local priest to pour blood of a chicken into a hole. Thereafter, some misfortune or accident is expected to befall the guilty. The most novel form is by putting two stones into boiling water, one of which is coloured. If the accused picks out the uncoloured one, he is innocent; if it is the coloured one, he is guilty.

Religion

The Sherdukpens profess Mahayana Buddhism, Lamaism as it is popularly called, but have none the less their repository of deities and spirits. The larger and more malevolent ones are those residing in water, known as black water spirits. When a disease breaks out, *Jifi*, the village priest, ties a row of flags across a stream to propitiate them. A confluence of two streams of dark and muddy water is regarded as the home of a spirit called chhaur. They also believe in a land beyond the Himalayas, exclusively of women, where live the Sinmus, especially inimical to lamas who destroy sacred books. Much dreaded is Eskandome Jaina who comes to torment men in their dreams.

A structure special to them is the Kakaling, a fifteen feet high stone gate elaborately pointed with traditional designs and Buddha figures. It is believed to drive away all evil spirits and bring peace and prosperity. Its origin is traced to a lotus flowering in Buddha-Gaya, called Mintopema, out of which emerged a spirit, Sange Thumme, who

urged them to erect the gate, as it would bring peace to those who pass through it, including animals. They are built in several villages.

In the centre of an important Kakling rests Manle Pechha, a sacred book giving formulas for curing a thousand diseases, said to have been compiled by eight lamas whose figures are painted around in a circle. Each lama has a humanitarian job towards people, including assigning places to the departed souls.

Dress

Except for the aristocrats, who on special occasions wear elaborate dresses, the men's wear is simple. A piece of cotton or endi silk called Sapo is tied diagonally across the upper part of the body with the two ends pinned on the shoulder, with a full sleeved jacket worn over it. In winter, a coat is added. They wear an attractive black felt skullcap called gurdam, made from yak's hair and decorated with small tassels jutting down over the face with a white cockade at the side, and finished off with a colourful band around the brim. The aristocrats, however, wear splendid Tibetan knobbed-hats of fur and yellow brocade. Because of its social significance, the important item is a six to eight feet long sash of thick coloured fabric with decorated borders. A sword or a large knife, dao is sported, stuck in a sheath and tucked across. Equally characteristic is the attractively woven bag of distinctive patterns worn on one side. In addition, a decorative cloth called bogre is tied round the shoulders, forming a fold at the back, and used as a knapsack or pouch to hold even eatables. This is a special cloth made from a local fibre, hongche. The central motif embroidered on this is the right-pointing swastika with a number of subordinate patterns round it in red, blue and black, sometimes green and yellow on a white background.

Women wear a loose sleeveless shirt hanging down to the knees, and over it a small full sleeved coat with coloured embroidery. They also tie a coloured sash called mukhak, and may sometimes wear a full sleeved coat. As a protection against stinging pets, they wrap a big piece of cloth round their calves, the ends finished with bead strings. All their fabrics are locally woven.

Sherdukpen girls of different ages do their hair differently. When young, the hair is cut round the head, but as they grow older, it is allowed to grow longer and fall over the face as a kind of a thin veil.

Later, after marriage or the birth of a child, it is tied up behind the head in a loose bun. Generally, they do not cover their heads but may occasionally wear a cap.

Arts and Crafts

They are highly skilled weavers, using mainly yarn from the bark of plants known as bong chong and hongche. It is very strong, and is even used for fishing nets or bow strings. Diamond and lozenge patterns as are also seen on Harappan pottery, are prominent in their fabrics like fret patterns. Triangles too are associated with diamond patterns. Their favourite design is a swastika in the centre with large variegated patterns around, representing the eyes of yaks or pigeons, the face of a sheep, scenes of arrow-shooting, nature scenes such as flowers, leaves, trees, etc. The borders are multicoloured, the most popular design being the "Chinese fence," so called because the Sherdukpens explain, it is the line dividing their country from the Chinese, one of the several fanciful explanations.

There is a lovely tale about the origin of certain designs. A girl had a snake for a lover and when he was coiled on her lap she copied the markings on his body and their colours, as reflected in the cloud. The bags in particular carry rich and complicated geometrical designs, each with a special name. For instance, Sitmandaon has seven vertical lines and Daon Dhum Dham are horizontal patterns. Large crosses composed of five smaller ones appear on their bags, as also on their cowrie patterns. They also make exquisitely woven bamboo mats, baskets, even containers for carrying beer. Some designs found in textiles are also seen in basketry, such as the zigzags, chevron, diamonds, triangles, spirals, squares, etc.

They are excellent carpenters, both at making items of utility as well as at fine carvings. They are clever at turning out bottles of cane lined with rubber for holding water and liquor. Their best work is in wood, turning out beautiful bowls, cups, plates and other useful items.

The Sherdukpens decorate their faces and paint their lips with a sticky substance from pine resin mixed with charcoal dust, applied with thin bamboo sticks or stamped with wooden moulds.

Men and women wear necklaces of beads in a great range of sizes and colours. These are evidently dear to their hearts, because in the event of a death in the family, bead ornaments become taboo for a

year. Bangles, neck ornaments and rings are highly decorated both by engravings on them or by being studded with stones or beads.

Dances and Pantomimes

The dances mainly revolve around animals such as the yak, deer, lion, and birds like the peacock. They portray, above all, a poignant love of these people for animals. Every dance is woven round the story of an animal, and naturally, the postures, movements and rhythmic steps are related to that animal.

Perhaps the Sherdukpens' best creation in the performing arts is the pantomime. This involves wearing of elaborate dresses, ornate ornaments and a large number of masks, some human faces, some of animals and birds, and a monstrous set of faces meant to intimidate evil spirits. One of the popular themes is woven round a yak which portrays a man driven away from home. When in great distress, he comes across a yak, and a happy relationship is brought about between the two. It is said that as a result, the yak family began to multiply. The yak is a most valued possession in a Sherdukpen family.

The pantomime built up around the yak is known as the yak dance. The yak in the pantomime is formed by two men concealed under a black cloth, which they carry to form the body with a wooden head attached. The animal is shown with the figure of a goddess with raised arms on its back. There masked men represent an ancient hero named Apapek and his sons, all of whom dance around the yak, and relate the romantic story of its origin. Another dance known as the Afilama has two masked demon figures who dance with a boy dressed as a Raja and two others dressed as Ranis.

Another category of dances fall under moral lessons, aimed to inculcate the ethical norms pregnant in the Buddhist teachings. For example in the cow dance, when the cow (man with a cow mask) chases Apapek and his two sons, it is to teach them that if any one kills the cow, it will avenge this by persecuting the killer's ghost after the former's death. Similarly in the horse dance, the horse (man wearing a brightly painted horse's head) attacks three mummers who have been dancing with it. The moral to be drawn from it is that when people ill-treat a horse or overload it, their ghosts will be troubled by a horse sent by the god of death. There are other smaller pieces, also woven around different animals aimed at creating a deep

compassion towards these creatures. A very vivid theme is portrayed in a gentle-faced deer with magnificent antlers that melts the heart of the audience.

A general theme of the war against evil is picturised through a long pantomime known as the *Jachunga-Chhaman*, a bird dance, in which the troupe members wear brilliantly coloured bird-heads, and cover their bodies in resplendent clothes.

These masks are generally hollowed out of wood, with holes for the eyes and mouth, and painted. For the Afilama dance, a special one is made from felt decorated with bits of coloured cloth and goat's hair.

There are other presentations in lighter vein meant to be more entertaining than philosophical, with kings, queens, clowns as the main characters. The best known pantomime in this is Arakacho-Chham. For once when Lord Buddha saw the dejection on people's faces, he was filled with compassion. He sent the clowns Arachako and his wife to cheer them up by making them laugh.

The Lamas have their own special dances to mark important festivals, performed in the monastery itself. The themes are religious. The dancers wear elaborate marks and dance to the music of an orchestra of long trumpets, gongs and drums.

THE KHAMTIS

Origin and History

Like all tribals the Khamtis have their stories of origin. Here are a few. In the beginning there was all water. Then Phra (god) placed some earth on a fish's back and ordered a female to give birth to an egg. God cut the egg into two, placed one piece down to form the earth. Then by means of a hill, he constructed, ascended and fixed the other half above and this came to form the sky. In the beginning, there was a tree from whose berry came a flower which brought forth twins, a baby boy and girl.

Unlike most of the other Indian tribals, the Khamtis were rather late arrivals, coming into India in the late 18th century. They belong to the Shan group of the Tai family, Tai being a generic name denoting a great branch of the Mongloid people of Asia. Recent researches have revealed that the Tai were ruling in central and eastern China

from about 2,500 B.C., long before the formation of the present Chinese community, and had developed a culture all their own. As the Tai spread out, they acquired local appellations. The earliest to penetrate into the Indian peninsula around the 13th century and rule for 600 years were known in this region as Ahoms. They were amongst the few whom the Muslim invaders could not conquer. T.T. Cooper in his book *The Mishmee Hills* observes:

> To speak of the Khamtees as a tribe is to do them little justice, for there is about the word "tribe" which conveys wildness and want of culture, and this very far from forms a part of the Khamtees, in fact, from their social laws even civilised nations might take a lesson.

When the great Pong Empire whose recorded chronicle goes back to 600 A.D. was broken up by Burmese invaders, the Khamtis migrated. They had already attained a certain culture of their own of the Tai or Shan pattern. They have for instance a language with a script of their own, the Khamti language being listed as one of the seven main Tai ones.

They came down from the hilly tracts between Assam and the Irrawady Valley at the source of the river, known as Bhor-Khamti. They established themselves on the Tengpani river with the permission of the Assam Rajas who were Ahoms at the time, also from the same Tai group. Later, the Khamtis became emboldened enough to overthrow the Assamese (Ahom) Governor of Sadiya, an important region, and establish themselves as rulers assuming the Assamese titles and positions of dignity, such as *Gohain* for chief, which has been retained to this day. When the British arrived on the scene, they simply acquiesced in the arrangement and accepted it. Later, however, a fierce confrontation took place between the two, and the British defeated and dispersed them about so as to weaken their position. Subsequently, after they submitted themselves, they were allowed to return and settle down again. They are now to be found in the low-lying areas of the Lohit district. Curiously enough, this happens to be the same spot where the first batch of Khamti immigrants had settled.

The word Khamti means a land of gold. Kham is gold and Ti is place. The original land Maopang or Maolung was rich in minerals, especially in gold, and thus came to acquire this name Khamti, a

name which the inhabitants also adopted. A legend says that there was a heavenly tree full of gold in the Bor-Khamti country. Another version is that Kham is a title given to this clan by some sovereign.

Economic and Social Life

The Tai race was always distinguished for wet rice growing, and it is not surprising that the Khamti should be excellent rice cultivators. There is an air of meticulous care about their fields and habitation. The larger level surfaces are intersected with irrigation canals, while in the smaller areas the streams are diverted by small dams into channels to water the slopes. Where the banks are high, bamboo wheels are used for pumping the water. The Khamtis are, in fact, ingenious at making water wheels, which are actually put to multipurpose use, like husking rice, grinding, crushing, etc., to save women from much drudgery. Even private houses standing on streams keep operating these wheels to perform various tasks, including the turning of prayer-wheels.

For cultivation, the entire community joins together on a communal basis. The produce is equally divided between each house according to the number of hands helping in the cultivation. The paddy is distributed every morning to each household from a common store. This is an important social organization in the community.

Though the tribal chief is traditionally accepted as the owner of all the land, in practice, only a small plot is allotted to him which is cultivated by his own labourers. Besides, there are small plots cultivated by individuals. The quality of their rice is famous. They also cultivate a much larger variety of vegetables than many other tribals. They are very knowledgeable about cattle, and are well-versed in animal husbandry. They breed oxen and buffaloes, both for tilling as well as for trade, and especially for barter. They are excellent traders and go on trading expeditions also by river rafts negotiating torrential rapids most skilfully.

Their stocks consist of grain, metalware, ornaments and a variety of handicrafts. They are also excellent hunters both on land and water.

Habitation

The Khamtis live in fairly large villages in houses of strong timber frames built on platforms several feet above the ground, reached by a ladder which is usually the notched trunk of a tree. They are sound and comfortable with strong thatched roofs. A house could be twenty feet wide and a hundred feet long. The interior is divided into private chambers separated from those for reception, with a railed open balcony in front. An intriguing features of the house is that the floor where the family lives is fully hid under low projecting eaves, and is not visible. The public store-houses where the village grain is stored built on river banks for fear of fire are striking in appearance.

Graves

Like every thing else about the Khamtis, the burial ground is a tidy spot kept apart from the village. The graves are surmounted by conical shaped tumuli which when first constructed diminishes from the base to the apex in a series of steps, the earth being kept in position by bamboo matting around each step. In early times, the tumuli over those of the Rajas' used to be extensive, the coffins themselves being very massive, decorated with gold, silver ornaments and various utensils, with arms and implements of agriculture placed inside.

The Khamtis are socially conscious of protocol. The society is divided into classes, each with a distinct status. The chief is the highest in rank followed by the priest wielding both social influence and religious sanction. The chief, however, consulted the people in taking important decisions. As one of them said to an English visitor: "If you are earnest in winning our goodwill, you must be prepared to recognize both chiefs and the people, for without the consent of the people, the Rajas themselves can do nothing to help visiting persons like you."

Dormitories

The Khamtis have separate dormitories for boys and girls, and call the latter the "House of the Virgins." It is situated at one end of the village and is considered sacred where no man is permitted inside. A very strict vigilence is maintained. At the other end of the village is

the boy's dormitory.

Dress

The Khamtis have an air of neatness about themselves and their total make-up. The men wear cotton or silk multicoloured chequered *lungis*, sarongs, round their waist, tight-fitting jackets, usually of blue cotton and white turbans on their heads but twisted in such a way as to leave the knot free into which their long hair is tied up atop their heads.

The women have a cotton lower garment, generally in a deep shade which is folded over the breasts under the arms, finally coming down up to the ankles. The top consists of a long-sleeved jacket. The women also wear a sash, usually of coloured silk around the waist. The petticoat is generally of the same material as the jacket, blue being popular. A striking feature about these women is their elaborate hair-do. The hair is drawn up from the back and the sides in one big roll so that it rises quite visibly above the head to form a kind of a crown, which gives them an added height. This is a sign of marriage. This is then encircled by an embroidered band with fringes and tassels at the end that hang down behind. The apparel is prepared by themselves through spinning, weaving, dyeing, embroidery, etc. Unmarried girls wear their hair in a roll low down on the occiput. The women also love to wear coral and other bead necklaces. As ear ornaments they wear cylindrical pieces of bright amber inserted into the ear lobes.

Crafts

Weaving may be assigned the place of prime importance in crafts. Only women weave. The looms are normally small and simple with the single heddle tension, loin loom as it is called, which has a warp of six yards by eighteen inches. Instead of a reed, a wooden "sword," which is a slip of a bamboo, is used to beat up the weft, while the actual weave is done with a bamboo tube throw-shuttle. The Khamtis use a slightly larger loom than the others. The fly-shuttle loom is being increasingly introduced and encouraged by the administration through opening craft centres to accelerate production. The material from the loin loom is tighter and firmer, and turns out more subtle and complicated designs. The obvious advantage of a loin loom is its

easy mobility, especially when a woman has also got to be at her fields and can easily transport it about.

The Khamti women are sensitive to colours and their combinations. They get unusual and startling effects through the exercise of their own sensibilities in design. Curious birds of geometrical type seen on Khamti bags are characteristic of their style. They make their own dyes from plants which are generally fast and produce most attractive shades.

The Khamtis are good metal workers and meet not only their own requirements but also that of the neighbouring region. Their speciality has been silver work, for Bor Khamti has a silver mine, though it does not seem to have been fully exploited. Silver ornaments are popular, the most in use being the ones which women use to divide the raised knots on their heads.

A matter of special note is the prestigious custom among the chiefs to work in metals as a principal hobby. They are able to give more time and concentrate better than others who do metal work in addition to other chores, especially cultivation. The manufacturing process is simple. The silver is melted and poured into the hollow of a bamboo, and is repeatedly heated with great patience and perseverance into paper-thin plates. With a clever manipulation of the hammer, they spread it to the length required to bend it into a cylinder. The edges are then cut and parts to be soldered notched in a castellated form, the alternate projections inserted, and a little borax with very thin plate laid over the joint, which unites quickly with little heating. A curve is then given to the sides of the cylinder, when the top alone is required to finish it The round top when thin enough is laid on a bed of lac softened by heat, and any embossed pattern can be made on it. With the aid of sharper punches pretty designs are turned out on earrings and other ornaments. At one time, the chiefs used to also forge weapons with it. Outstanding amongst these are embossed shields of buffalo or rhinoceros hide, gilded and lacquered with skill and taste.

Carving is also done expertly in bone and ivory. In the handles of weapons in ivory, an inexhaustible store of imagination and innovation is displayed, as also in carving in high relief which includes items like quivering snakes, fierce dragons and other monsters, and also gentle animals. Their finest carvings are religious figures, especially of Lord Buddha. They are characterized by beauty and grace. Poker-work is one of their specialities. They make beautiful designs

on mugs, knives, pipes, combs, earplugs and sheaths. Most striking are the designs on the "sword" used in weaving.

A product special only to the Buddhists of Arunachal is the mask. The Khamtis make them mainly by stretching coloured cloth on bamboo frames. They are used in ceremonial dances to illustrate tales from the lives of Buddha. For instance, an animal is contrived by stretching a black cloth on a wicker frame with red painted lips and small mirrors for eyes. It represents one of the animals that troubled Lord Buddha during the temptations that harassed him. Another well known mask is made of yellow cloth stretched over a cane base with mirrors used for eyes to represent one of the demons who tempted Buddha.

Festivals, Dances and Dramas

Arunachal has a large variety of dances portraying the movements of animals and birds, seasonal dances connected with harvesting, religious dances at rituals and festivals, and also dances as war celebrations. The yak dance is the same performed by the Sherdukpens. There are similar themes woven round the lion, peacock, deer, etc. The deer dance is quite alluring, with movements capturing the timid gentleness and frightened alertness of this lovely creature. The story goes as follows. An old shepherd and his sons succeeded in trapping a deer, but as they were about to kill it, the villagers persuaded them to free it. They also have the cockfight dance. And the harvest dance is performed with solemnity like a ritual when thanks are offered to the harvest just brought in and prayers offered for a good crop in the future.

The Khamtis perform plays to celebrate the birth and death of Lord Buddha. The birth scenes are marked by lively presentation of an accouchement. Boys take the part of girls. A girl gets into the bed and infantile cries are heard, and out of her clothes a tiny puppy is brought out as a new-born babe and taken to bathe, squealing and howling, and generally being treated as a new-born babe. The death scenes are poignantly depicted through various postures of grief and sorrow at the loss.

For the Khamtis, the festivals continue round the year. The two important ones centre round the birth and death of Lord Buddha.

The other big festival is Samkyen at the start of the Hindu new year. The preparations begin at least a fortnight ahead and with a great

deal of eclat the young people rehearse their songs, mimes, dramas, and make elaborate decorations, setting up a temporary temple for the ceremonies and an indigenous mechanism for spraying water around from a boat. The Buddha images from the temples or viharas are taken out by the priests and kept for bathing. The festival opens with an invocation of good omen—the mangalsutra—with young men and women singing the chorus. The priests first pour water over themselves, then water is poured over the images, while the young people throw water, colour and mud at each other. In the evening, the villagers come to the vihara to light a number of lamps. The following day, the washing of the images is repeated, after which alms and food are distributed. After the last wash, the images are put back again when there is much feasting and prayers, and the panch-sila and the tisarana formulas are sung in unison.

Religion

The Khamtis profess the Hinyana or Theravada faith. Curiously this had travelled originally from India to Sri Lanka, thence to Burma and from there the Khamtis brought it back to its original home, completing the circle. Nevertheless, living as they did in a predominantly non-Buddhist world, they retained close links with Burmese (Hinayana) Buddhism through the Burma Sangha, from which they continued to refresh the knowledge of their faith.

Every village has a *Vihara* (temple) which they call *Chang*, a structure that stands out prominently in the centre of the village, its Burmese-style high roof rising above all others. They are elaborately constructed and richly carved and ornamented. Everything about them is neat and tasteful. On the altar are images of the Buddha. It is perhaps not surprising that these images are all made in Burma, not India, as they seem to have natural links with a country which gave them their faith. There are also pictures of scenes from Jataka tales, Vimanavathu, Petavatthu adorning the walls.

The priests, *bapus* as they are called by the Khamtis, live in monastries called by them *bapu ghars* (priest homes) and pursue their religious lore. There is a priest to be found in every village to minister to the spiritual, educational and social needs of the local community. He teaches scriptures and the Khamti language, especially to the young, performs rites at all rituals and generally guides the social life. Nothing is undertaken without consulting him. The priests are

in a way more important than the chiefs. They are distinguished by their ochre robes, worn rather like the togas of the ancient Romans. The usual custom for them is to go round and collect their daily food from all houses, holding a lacquered box in which the offerings, generally given by women, are collected. They are, therefore, designated *bhikkus*, literally meaning beggars.

All this provides a deep religious core to the daily life of the Khamtis. In addition, an intellectual environment is provided by their collection of old books. I was told that the whole Tripitaka was rendered from Pali into the Tai-shan language, and one finds these texts preserved in the different viharas. Care and preservation of books is a very great tradition amongst the Buddhists. Gifts of books, pothidana or pustakdana, is considered a pious act. Having these sacred texts copied carefully in hand to present them to viharas is recognized as a meritorious performance. In fact, the presentation is done ceremoniously. In the olden days, as one understands, paper was indigenously made from the soft bark of a tree. Leaves of this paper would be bound up at one end after copying the text, folded and kept in a roll covered with cloth. Now of course the ordinary paper is used, though keeping the papers rolled up continues.

The Viharas also contain a number of handbooks on the various tenets and principles of the faith, among them being the popular ones like panchsila, in fact, interpretations of all the five shilas. These hand-books also cover descriptions of pagodas, especially in Burma, the Bodhi tree and vihara; nitis, guidelines for the dos and donts. There are also books on Sukantala (mantras) which when chanted have the power to remove evil, misfortunes, diseases, etc. Jataka tales are also found in these books. The list is too vast and varied for complete enumeration. It is significant that the Ramayana and Mahabharata also find a place, as also do tales from Sri Lanka and China.

There are also sociological treatises starting with the society of the old Tai times. They consist of a set of judicial rules, describing various crimes, how to collect evidence, how penal measures are to be applied. It is interesting to note that these cover the bhikkus as well, including all sections of the people.

It will thus be seen that the Khamtis arrived with a strong background of a definite culture, a well-formed language and a pronounced religion. It is true that the large body of Khamtis may not have grasped in full the noble teachings of Lord Buddha or understood

the depths of his magnificent message. Still they breathed in some flavour of it. Though they continue to have their many little benevolent and malevolent spirits, still Lord Buddha is their Supreme Being, and they observe every Thursday as his birthday and fast. They make no animal sacrifices.

With this background, it is perhaps not surprising that the Khamtis should prove more susceptible to new ideas and current trends. Here, one finds the young *bapus* in their religious robes attending the secular school run by the administration. It will be interesting to watch the effect of this dual educational system, for they still continue to live in the *bapu ghars*, conforming to the traditional style of life even though they attend classes at school.

Chapter Two

Tribalism in India

5 The Gaddies of Himachal Pradesh

The Gaddies are amongst the most striking tribals. They live mostly in the Chamba district of Himachal along the rivers Ravi and Budl Nadl.

Origin

Though their present home is Brahmaur in the Bhandil Valley near Chamba, the ancient belief is that they really migrated from some other place due to Muslim persecution. They still have an old saying: "Ufra Lahore, bassaya Brahmaur." Brahmaur was the ancient capital of the Chamba state. Thus the area surrounding it is called Gadderan: land of the Gaddis. That they attained a high degree of aesthetics is evident from the richly carved temples, the statues and images. One Gaddi King, Meru Vermder, who was styled as a great Suryavansi, had evidently built up a sizeable kingdom extending over the entire Ravi Valley and beyond. He even humbled Kulu, Manali, etc., and held uninterrupted sway for 400 years from Brahmaur, before the royal seat shifted to Chamba.

The story goes that Champavati, daughter of the then ruler, Raja Sahil Verman, took a fancy to this little plateau by the riverside, and persuaded the father to move his capital there. Thus the new city came to be named after the young princess. The kingdom rose to

great heights judging from the high single complex of seventeen shikara-type temples in Chaurasi which continue to draw the admiration of archaeologists and architects. The dynasty traces its lineage back to well over a thousand years. In fact, it is regarded as the oldest principality in India at least in that region. It is said to have even caught the roving eye of the chronicler Huan Tsang who described it as a place of note. The Gaddi army in those days was a factor to reckon with. It may be news to many of us that a sizeable number of their descendents serve in the Indian army today.

Those who visit this region get the impression that the Gaddis are nomadic shepherds, for one sees them moving up or down the steep paths surrounded by large flocks of sheep and goats flanked by their fierce-looking dogs who are really legendary. They are able to repel attacks from bears and panthers. There is a deep passionate attachment between them and their dogs. The Gaddis can be marked out as a distinctive group. They look simple but powerful, stalwart like most hill shepherds.

The man wears a coat with thick folds of cotton padding or other clothing running down to the knees with a big collar hanging loose in two lappets in the front and tightly fastened with a waistband or girdle to the waist, with a black woollen cord tying up the pyjamas, which are tight at the legs. Around the neck hangs a square silver-plate to adorn the neck. From the girdle hangs a knife, a flint box and a small leather bag for cash. Each of these articles is beautifully ornamented. The pouch for tobacco or money-bag is unique, a distinctive creation of their own. Like many other tribals, tobacco pouches are a speciality here and ornamented with great care in varied geometrical patterns. The wheel pattern is striking, obtained by a combination of sharply pointed isosceles triangles with alternate diagonal hatching radiating from the centre, the whole being surrounded by elaborately enhanced concentric bands. Sometimes, a variation is wrought by twisting the outline a little to give it a mango shape or a fish body.

The *gaddons* (women) wear something similar, but wear in addition, an overall coat called *Cholu*, coming right down to the ankles and fastened around the waist with a thin rope. They also wear the same silver neck ornament, in addition to brass anklets.

Though the Gaddis are always taken as shepherds, they are in truth, both semi-nomadic and semi-agricultural. They spend the summer in the mountains grazing their animals, winter in the plains

cultivating food and other crops. They are in reality not nomads in the usual sense, though the name Gaddi is associated with the terms in usage for high pastures, and therefore, shepherds. In fact, they grow all their food requirements, they are only supposed to buy salt. Even though the community possesses a vast number of animals—some put their figure at 100,000—this does not seem to vastly improve their economic condition, as they are still quite isolated from modern knowledge and methods which might have reflected beneficially on them. Whatever wealth they have in the way of gold and sliver, they prefer to display on their person as ornaments.

Their dual occupations are due to economic pressures. The land they possess cannot feed them through the year and leaves them exposed to insecurity, for they have no other pursuits besides the pastoral. Moreover, women are prohibited from ploughing.

It is quite a sight to see their migrations. The man invariably carries a clay hukka and his all-purpose bag (*khalroo*) for cereal and other essentials. He seems to carry no extra clothes and it is not an uncommon sight to see a Gaddi carrying a new-born lamb wrapped up in his big chola in which he even sleeps on a cold night. The woman carries a heavy load on her shoulders, while the baby is tied at the back. Many a time she has to even help a toddler negotiate steep paths. They use no tents, just sleep out in the open. During monsoon, they take shelter under trees or even projecting rocks. It is said that if they are unable to get any such protection, they snuggle among the animals, drawing warmth from their coat.

Unlike the conventional nomads, the Gaddis are orderly, law-abiding and pay taxes to the government for grazing permits and using roads.

In the village, there is collective activity, even for building individual houses, in fact for any task which calls for more than what a family can handle. It is therefore not surprising that ritual friendship should prevail among the Gaddis. One novel feature here is that prospective friends make a pilgrimage to the Manimahesh Lake and enter the water together at a moment considered auspicious and exchange sweets, dot each other's forehead with a red mark as they pledge their loyalty. This friendship can be between people of opposite sexes too, but it is like family relationship and their children can expect succour from the parent's *sangatho* (pledged brother or sister, as the case may be).

An uncommon feature in the Gaddi social laws is the denial of divorce. When a married couple separates, each has to live with

someone else out of wedlock. A widow's children, no matter how much later they were born after the husband's death, will be accepted as legitimate and a part of the family, so long as she continues to live in her deceased husband's house.

Religion and Deities

The presiding deity of the Gaddis is Shiva who is supposed to fulfil their desires. As one of their saying goes:

> The Gaddi was grazing his flock
> The Gaddan offered incense to Shiva
> To the Gaddi he gave sheep
> And to the Gaddan beauty.

Their most holy spot of pilgrimage is Manimahesh, a lake situated near Mount Kailash. Because of their deep dedication to this deity, they call their land *Shiva bhumi* (land of Shiva). Their devotion is enshrined in a temple of Harihar with numerous lingas. They have temples of Rama and Krishna, and other Hindu gods whom they also worship. A significant concept they have conjured up is that of Shiva possessing two capitals, one on the Kailash peak, and therefore, visible to the people of the surrounding hills; the other in the lower region at Patalpur. This seems a subconscious reflection of their own life divided between two regions.

The Gaddis also have faith in spirits whom they seek to propitiate by sacrifices. They are known as avatars, which means spirits raised to the level of local deities. Kaily Bir is supposed to be the spirit of one who died childless, and therefore likely to harm a pregnant woman. It is regarded as malignant causing illness, but thoughtful enough to warn people in their dreams of any impending disaster. To propitiate him, the woman puts away four copper coins along with her necklace invoking the name of the deity. Three months later, the child arrives. The mother and the priest offer worship and sacrifice.

Gunga is an equally menacing spirit, but attacks only animals. A strange rite is performed for her through an offering of an iron pan (leaf) in a cattle shed facing the sacred fire where a drop of blood from the sacrificed male goat is sprayed on the pan. Some of the cakes and sweets are served to the household, while the rest buried.

They are very particular about observing what they call *Devo Samskars* (rituals connected with the spirit of the dead), lest they haunt their living relations. To please them, even small houses are built on the village outskirts called bangalands, and the spirits are supposed to live there quietly.

Sacrifices are offered on particular occasions like prior to ploughing, laying a foundation-stone raising the central beam in a structure at birth, marriage and death, before undertaking a journey, etc. Preparing the animal is also quite a ritual. The animal is washed, flowers and rice showered on its head, and then water and grass offered to it, while all devotees watch the animal holding copper coins in their hand. If it shudders, it means god has accepted the sacrifice. The priest keeps chanting invocations all through and becomes entitled to the animal's skin, head and a leg, the rest being dispersed.

The Gaddis also believe in magic and take recourse to it through usual rites. One of the talisman they carry is either a piece of an animal's skin as a protection against the inimical power. They strangely believe that magical force makes a person appear a pale shadow of his or her real self.

The most exciting element is, however, witchcraft. Their witches are so true to the popular image that they even ride on broomsticks. The witches, known as dayans, leave their abode at nightfall, resting the broomsticks near the bed and casting a spell on the families they live with, so that they may not become aware of the witches' departure. They ride on birds or animals in the forest where they dance all night, but return to their house before the people are awake.

To counter this menace, a witch doctor, *gardi chela* possessing special powers, is provided. He has a novel method of treating patients afflicted by witchcraft. He begins by playing on the dupatra (a stringed instrument). Then he throws a small shell, cowri, towards the patients to cast a spell. After this they dance, at the end of which the chela is able to disclose the name of the dayan who troubles the patients. Then they have to dip their palms and feet into a bucket full of water, while their bodies are dusted by a peacock feather, its particles falling into the water. This treatment is continued until the patient recovers. Illness is said to be brought on by introducing some object, may be a tuft of hair or an effigy of turmeric over which a spell has been cast, into the house of the one who is the target for destruction. To cast this evil off, a ceremony is held. The chela keeps a *mani* (wooden pot) in the house. Neighbours are collected and a red

thread tied on to the wrist of one of them, and a pot put into his hand. The chela goes on scattering rice around as he recites the invocation. The man with a pot begins to move, and is believed to be led to the spot where the spell was cast. There the floor is dug and the buried article recovered and removed. This rite is also used to recover stolen goods.

The Gaddis also resort to getting the chela into a trance to divien the causes of misfortunes and diseases through special rites.

Though the Gaddis live rather remote and isolated lives, they present a picture of a carefree and happy people with a dignified and gracious sense of ease, even when they trek over the precipitous passes. It is natural that their sense of inner joy should find spontaneous expression in singing and dancing. The men look most striking as they leap and dance brandishing their staves. It is rather surprising to find that their songs are mostly romantic and sentimental woven round famous lovers like Chancola and Kunpoo, or Phulaman and Ranjhum. They are the heartiest when they sing about life in the hills with the refrain "Jeena Pahareda" or "Chamba diya dhara" extolling the beauty of the Chamba hills.

Chapter Two

Tribalism in India

6 The Savaras of Orissa

Linguistically, the Savaras or Saoras belong to the Mandri group, distinctly apart from the Dravidian and the Aryan. Once a ruling race, which conquered Cheros, and ruled at Kikata (550-990 A D.). The last king, Pudi Chandra, was routed by Bhoja Raja. There are remoter references to them in the epics, most noted being Sabari, immortalized by her intense devotion to Rama for whom she waited patiently almost a lifetime. He blessed her, and when she ascended the heaven, the whole firmament was lighted by her glory. The early historical reference is to their king, Sabariditya, who was defeated and killed by Kamaranava, the founder of the Kalinga dynasty. Thus, the Savaras were finally driven to the remoter hill region like so many other tribes. Bana, the noted writer, concedes that the Savara Chief inspired awe by virtue of his natural greatness, and his form could not be surpassed.

The Savaras live on hill slopes, but always near streams. They are good permanent cultivators, not jhum, resourceful with irrigation bunding of even mountain streams, channelling them down the slopes for terraced field cultivation. They also do food gathering.

They plan their villages, build houses in parallel rows and present a picture of orderliness.

They are highly creative as well as artistic. They love to decorate themselves. Both men and women wear heavy bead necklaces. They

also deck themselves with ornaments made of seeds, nuts, bamboo shavings, grass, straw, feathers, flowers, in fact, draw liberally on nature. They make quite unusual gifts like hairpins and gorgeous hair hangings of straw and flowers. These articles are most delicately wrought and are precious pieces of art to look at. In fact, several other ornaments like rings, bangles, earrings, etc., are similarly made. Men fancy white plumes and headgears of peacock and hornbill feathers. Hides and bones, the left-over after hunting expeditions are used as decorations especially to ornament the shikar implements. Cowries too are widely used, sewn in clusters on their clothes, in the shape of stars and flowers on skirt borders, stuck in their hair, etc.

Cowries are also made into gorgeous fringes which hang over from bullock covers, necklaces for animals, etc. Women use cowries in their ornaments along with heavy bead necklaces. Girdles are particularly popular with Saora women. They are generally made of dark blue beads that hang down from the back. Some are of brass cubes. They also wear bronze anklets and toe rings. There is also a legend connected with women and jewellery.

Long ago, when women wore no ornaments, a rich man brought home gold and silver jewels from a journey. His daughter cried out after seeing them. The father tried various ways of consoling her, but she was inconsolable. So, finally, he let her deck herself with those ornaments. Since then women came to use them increasingly.

The peacock is not only an object of decoration but also supposed to possess magical properties. Because of its abundant fertility, it becomes a symbol of fertility also. The feathers have a regal dignity and associations. While all tribals use this as a symbol, some like the Savaras, pay special attention to it. They use it generously in their pictographs. It has close associations witht heir rituals. Their little shrines for tribal gods have a little wooden spire rising above the circular thatched roof atop which is placed a roughly carved image of a peacok, considered as a watchman and guardian. The reason for giving this bird special attention is explained by a legend. There was a hero whose flowing hair shone and sparkled like lightning. Once, when he was cutting wood in the forest shaping a plough, his hair kept blowing into his eyes, distracting his vision. He pulled it off in rage and threw it away. And this hair became the tail of a peacock.

The elephant is another popular image painted on walls, carved on doors and even moulded as a finial. It is the symbol of wealth. It is drawn as well as carved with vigour, each with a distinctive character.

According to tribal legends, elephants could once fly.

The comb is a highly prized article. It is also of great antiquity, obviously considered essential, for it also finds an honoured place as a decorative motif. It is carved on doors, pillars, walls, etc., and also included in their religious pictographs. It can also be used as a popular piece of adornment since it is elaborately used in varied geometrical or floral patterns.

In Saora legends, it is the god who seems to be doing things for men rather than the other way round. There is a charming story about this: Ramdan, Bimma and the other gods were so weary of digging with their hands that they asked Galbesen, the highest among the Savaras, to find an alternative to their hand. Whereupon Galbesen broke off his own left leg to be used as a plough. Later a copy of it was made in wood. This is how the plough came into existence.

Crafts

Savaras consider earthenware pots auspicious. It is considered a good omen to see a woman with a pot. Being essential in daily living, it is also adopted as a necessary part of the religious culture. Pots are hung from the roof, they are kept in the shrine, put in the verandah, made into sacred lamps, used for the transportation of the soul, employed in divination, treated as omens, they are needed to feed the dead and so on.

Saora potters live in groups as cultivators with pottery as subsidiary They make pots, lamps and bowls from rough clay, and occasionally images with a wooden hoop. They use a wheel balanced on a stake about three feet high. After shaping the pots, they beat out any irregularities with a wooden block, and finally fire them by heaping straw and wood over them in a shallow pit.

The Saora custom is to buy a new pot, put grain into it, a copper coin, a bit of ginger, hang it from the roof of the house or at a shrine, attach to it flowers, leaf pipes and ears of grain, bunches of mangoes, pods of pulse as the seasons come round with their varied produce from time to time. Such pots are dedicated at important ceremonies. Sun or snake is painted on the pot with rice-flour.

Musical Instruments

The essential purpose of musical instruments is religious. They may

be played impromptu but, for a proper performance, a ceremonial occasion is required.

The Saora band consists of three or four drums of various types. The large hemispherical dolluk, the tuduman, which is a simple tom tom, the kettle drum called dagaden, and perhaps the Kadingan hide gong. Rising above all the rhythms of drums are the long wailing notes of the brass horns, which are about three feet long and gently curved. There is always a brass gong vigorously beaten with a wooden stick, cymbals also of brass, possibly a bundle of reeds which are beaten by hand with a clattering din.

For dances, more emphasis is given to the rasps and reed bundles, and a small fiddle which consists of a bamboo stem about a foot long is attached to a sounding box of half a coconut covered with lizard skin; it has two strings and a bridge, and is played with a bamboo bow strung with sago palm fibre. It is also used as a love-fiddle like guitar. Another stringed instrument is the memerajan or breast instrument resembling a guitar. A bamboo neck has four to six frets attached to it with bees-wax. Two wire strings spread apart are passed over these. The first gives melody, the second drone to the two small gourds below cut out at the bottom and secured to the bamboo neck by their closed ends. It is held with the open ends of the gourds towards the body; they are pressed against it or released to regulate the volume of sound. The wires are plucked by the right hand while the left fingers the stops.

The most important ritual instrument is the Kuranrafan at whose music the dead and gods are said to come and the dance. It is made of a two-feet long bamboo with the head-piece carved in the shape of a peacock's head. There are two fibre strings and a large gourd is attached by its back to the bamboo neck. The open outer end of this resonator is pressed to keep the time and key. The drone of this is said to induce a trance. Even the making of this is a ritual. The Doddurafan is a rasp or stridulator made of a bamboo piece down the middle of which has been made a slit which is rugged with small grooves on either side. These are scraped with a stick. The upper part of the slit may be covered with one hand to improve the resonance. Sometimes, a buffalo's horn is similarly serrated. A special kind of rasp called ragobdrafan is used at marriages. In this case, the serrated bamboo is fitted to the stem of a gourd drinking-dipper, and it is decorated with peacock feathers.

Flutes are also popular, they are with five or seven stops.

Gongs are used as demon scarers, mainly at funerals. Buffalo horns are sounded while weeding in the fields, but not while threshing or harvesting.

Gongs, cymbals and earthen drums are not played at weddings. The proper wedding instruments are the fiddle, gogerafan and memerafan and the raspr.

Bunches of little brass bells are worn during dances at festivals or sacrifices. Sometimes, strings of large beans or seeds are attached to the ankles. Offerings are made to instruments at prominent festivals, a little wine being dropped on the drums to make them sound better. The creative art instinct seems deeply rooted in the Saoris and finds varied expressions. Most striking are their wall-paintings, called Itlam. Drawings made on the walls of houses to propitiate the dead, to propagate fertility or to keep off disease usually go with sacrifice. It is an annual feature and the paintings are renewed sometimes with fresh variations, especially to ensure a good harvest. The painting may be done by the householder himself as inspired by his dreams or he may call in an *Ittalmaran*, wall-writing man. An elaborate preparation has to be done from before for occasions such as offerings or prayers. The man painting on the wall must fast until his painting has finished.

The wall is washed red. For paint, rice-flour and water or ashes and water are mixed which gives a sharp white. Emphasis is sometimes given with strokes of lamp black or red ochre from stone.

Most of the designs are built around a house—a square, circle or rectangle, which is filled in and surrounded with figures of men and animals. The frame is marked by multiple straight lines, elaborately enhanced with rows of dots or stars. The same technique is followed whether it is a structure, human figure, animal or bird, though the forms differ. When completed, it is dedicated and, thereafter, becomes a sort of a shrine before which offerings are made on ceremonial occasions. At harvest festivals, ears of grain or fruits are hung round it. The human figure is shown as a single triangle with heads and legs attached. Sometimes, two triangles are shown with points meeting at the waist.

Some paintings are made in emergencies, such as for protection against human or crop disease. The fertility ones are made either for Labosum, the earth god, or for the ancestors whose interest in the harvest is demonstrated. For Labosum, the painting shows aploughman with the auspicious pipe in his mouth, and the son engaged in ploughing.

On an elephant sit Jemra Kittiang and Sidibiradi. This is a kind of a standard picture, repeated in various forms. Ittalams are painted at Jammolpur time, the ceremonial removal of the seed from store for sowing when a sacrifice is offered to guard and improve fertility. They depict agricultural operations, such as ploughing or hoeing and include fertility symbols. They also show a man ploughing, a pregnant woman carrying seed, potter laden with pots, gods seated on an elephant. Seeds are offered before each so that the harvest may be the best.

One sees an exuberant scene, a party of merrymakers dancing round ploughman with harrows at work, waving their arms, carrying pots on their heads or shoulders, some carrying two to indicate the harvest may be double. The sun and moon look down as witnesses. Birds, deer and a porcupine are painted in the hope they will not go into the field and do the damage. In the Ittalam painted for ancestors, the main item is the palace of the dead ancestors. Monkeys frolic on the roof, and attendants and guards surround the building. Below to the left is the house for tutelaries and beside it is their armoury. The tutelaries are themselves seated on an elephant carrying umbrellas in their hands, with their clerk riding on a horse in front. The Ittalam is also said to gurad the house against thieves, and is looked on as a watchman.

Sometimes the Ittalman is not supposed to be the right one, and after some unfortunate event or evil sign, it is rubbed out and a new one done accompanied by the usual ceremonial sacrifices.

At times a very old snake is shown trying to swallow the sun, a motif included to avert danger from eclipses. An Ittalam made to avert disease usually aims at flattering the god by showing what a splendid palace he has and how many servants and pets he possesses, and the imporant people who come to call on him. Each house is crowded with servants, one has a party of dancers with feathers in their hair. The gods are riding on their elephants and horses. A man carries a bundle of grass for Gadalsum, the god of the grass-cutters. The Ittalam for Gadalsum shows the god himself standing on the left with a bundle of grass, protected by two snakes which bite anyone who comes to cut grass before the proper time. One also sees the marriage of the gods. In the centre is the palace, and people are dancing around led by the god himself. Outside, monkeys are dancing with joy on the trees. The sun, moon and stars shine down on the scene. Guests arrive on elephants for the marriage, but the landlord comes on the mare

followed by its foal and two she-goats for the feast. Two men bring in a sambhar killed by servants while the potter brings pots for rice-beer. The Range Officer also attends with family sitting on chairs. An unwanted guest is caught by a dog, another one attacks a lizard while a man shoots it with a bow and arrow.

An essential thing we have to remember is that the Ittalam is made as a votive offering, not for display. Sometimes a god wants to live in a house, wishes to rest and sleep, so a house appropriate for the particular god is made on the wall by painting, and the god is then supposed to be satisfied. The place chosen may be the darkest corner, hidden behind pots and gourds. In fact, every effort is made to hide them from theh uman eye lest an unguarded word or an innate giggle might offend the spirit to which it is dedicated. The articles are symbols, and specailly designed to please the spirit. So everything that can serve this purpose is included. While the painter is direct, simple and sincere, and does not aim at any special effects, some fine results are achieved. The painting is done with a free hand with no preliminary sketching, yet everything seems to fall into place. The subject matter determines the style, whether it be treated simply or elaborately.

Though the styles do vary from region to region, there are certain general similarities. Tutelaries are made more elaborate because of the need to flatter. A noteworthy fact is the way they combine harmoniously realism with abstract suggestion. Normally, the pictures are of conventional items; some modern object like trains, cars, cycles, planes are now introduced if the painting is for the spirit of those who died abroad. Whereas human figures, animals, birds are depicted realistically with a lot of care bestowed on little details like the quills of a peacock's tail, houses and mountains are symbolically depicted in geometrical patterns of great variety. Human figures may strike an intermediate mean, for they are comparatively realistic in silhouette.

Dancing is also suggestive rather than realistic. Figures are painted in rows with feathers in their hair, holding drums or trumpets or with hands raised above their heads. No sexual indications are given, and the only way one can guess the sex of the figures is by the occupation in which they are shown, like women carrying pots. The word Ittalam connotes more writing than painting. In a sense this is appropriate, for these pictures are graphic messages to the gods and the spirits; they tell a story or convey a prayer, although they also pro-

vide structural expressions like habitation for gods. Some of these tribes rarely have a secular art. Most of it is religious, inspired and directed by religion. One thing is true that they are always vividly moved enough by deep emotion to some artistic self-expression. These pictures have been described as the record of their dreams, of their hopes and fears, and the dramatization of their theological beliefs. Apart from walls, decorations are also done on doors, pillars, cornices, etc.

Chapter Two

Tribalism in India

7 The Kurichyas of Kerala

An interesting fact to note about the Kerala tribals is the absence of the so-called criminal tribes. The Kurchiyas live in forests in the western part of the Western Ghats range.

Origin

They have several stories of their origin. Historically, they figure as sturdy warriors who helped the King of Kottayam in his battle with Wynad. After this adventure, they could not get absorbed. They went back to the King of Kottayam who settled them in the forest, where they could do both food gathering as well as cultivation. But this isolated them fully, as it were, from the rest of Kerala.

They live in scattered bamboo-huts thatched with grass on the hills. They are usually seen climbing up and down. Kurichya men mainly hunt, while their women do some elementary cultivation and the girls graze the cattle.

Religion

They call themselves Hill Brahmins. They say that the sage Shankara-charya especially dedicated God Malon in the forest for them. They also believe that God Malon watches them keenly to see if they

strictly keep to their social codes. They have, of course, several other gods, each standing for something. However, God Malon takes care of pollution, a very important element in their life. Mallakari is the god of hunting, Muthappan gives them protection from wild beasts, and so on; there are also goddesses like Bhadrakali, Bhagavathi, etc.

These gods also figure in trials for misconduct. An accused has to go hunting after paying respects to Mallakari. If he is successful in hunt, he is deemed innocent, if he fails, he is pronounced guilty. Excommunication from the tribe is the most common punishment.

Each of the other gods finds solutions for day-to-day problems. They both protect as well as punish. Special worship is offered for jungle crops as also protection from wild animals.

In all these communications and offerings to various gods, the priests have to be intermediaries. They also act as spokesmen for these gods. The punishment to the guilty from the concerned gods is conveyed by the priest who dances as he pronounces the sentence on the guilty. When they are free for a whole year from wild animals, especially elephants, a special thanksgiving is offered, called Uchak-kalasam. The priest usually dances to find out the wishes of Muthappan, and whether more thanksgiving ceremonies would need to be performed. Sometimes even four ceremonies are needed.

Priests seem to come from certain families. There are different grades, superior ones, and then the high priests exercising control over the others. The ordinary ones can attain the highest status by sacrifices and severities like fasting. The high priest, however, selects his own successor from among the superior grade. The mode of selection is most novel and attractively done by making them all dance. The selected one is marked out by showering flowers on him. The symbol of the superior or high priest is a silver-handled knife that he always carries with him.

Society and Social Customs : Birth

When a child is born, it is not automatically accepted into the community, it has to go through a certain ceremony like receiving *prasadam*, offering, from the high priest, food consecrated to the gods, in the name of Malon. On the second day, the child is given taste of toddy and rice curry. The ear-lobes of boys have to be pierced; for girls this is done later, but definitely before marriage.

Marriage

The Kurichaya society is matriarchal. A marriage alliance is brought about by the uncles of the boy and the girl negotiating. When the girl's uncle accepts five betel leaves from the boy's uncle, it is taken as the final agreement. A novel custom is to make a loud announcement as the bride enters the marriage pavilion. There is worship of Ganesh with a lamp, for which the bride's uncle provides an oil-wick lamp, while the groom gives rice.

The next ceremony, strangely enough, is a kind of a dialogue. The bride is told that if she has had secret connections she should reveal them now. Lying is abhorred. If she hides, she is in danger of developing a disease. If she admits her guilt, nobody seems to mind, the priest merely calls upon God Malon to forgive her. When the ceremony is over, she is given some final advice: "Obey your husband. Honour those you should. You should not come back if the husband speaks badly of your family. Now you think for yourself and conduct yourself in the best manner possible." Then there is a feast.

The last week of October is the Kurichayas' annual hunting day. A man who does not join this hunt is not considered a man. Bow and arrow is the proud symbol of manhood. Sickle is for the woman. Accordingly, it is a custom to plant an arrow on the tomb of the man, while the sickle is planted on that of the woman. This is interpreted to mean that the man must live in the next world also by hunting and the woman by cultivation, or else, the dead might come back crying: "I don't have my weapons." So they take care to provide them with these items.

The fear of pollution, which once prevailed intensely in Kerala, seems to be the predominant element in the Kurchiyas mental and social make-up. To begin with, for them the non-tribals are the polluted ones from whom they must keep safely away, except the Namboodris. Even children have to be protected from their shadow. This fear of pollution is all-pervasive and most complicated, touching all aspects of their life. No one should even touch their huts. Each class has a strict distance to observe, ranging from forty yards to forty times forty. There are other phases with variations in the degree according to which the cleansing off is regulated. If the pollution is caused by a Muslim, one to six dips suffice, depending on the proximity of the polluting object. It is far stricter, for instance, in the case of a woman returning from her menstrual bath, for she should not be

seen even at a distance. In fact, she is expected to live alone and have no contact with anyone. She is expected to get her food by standing in knee-deep water which cleanses her, so that she can be visible. Her relatives then float down a plate of gruel to her, which she picks up for her feed.

Excommunication is not only a disgrace, it is a painful experience too, for the victim has to leave the forest for some period with only a bow and arrow. A school can also be polluted. When that happens, the children cannot eat there until it is purified. Thus the image of the Kurichya has become inextricably woven with this overpowering fear of pollution.

A recent and a wonderful chapter in the history of the Kurichyas deserves narration. The British captured the fort and palace of the King of Kottayam and Wynad. Though utterly defeated and almost abandoned, the king refused to surrender. He entered the Kannavan forest to plan a strategy. There the forest dwellers Kurichyas, rallied behind him, and under their Commander Thalakalal Chandu pledged their full support. The English Army, however, resorted to some trick and captured Kannavan, killed the king's prime minister and hung his body out in the open. The Kurichyas stood firmly by the king, and resorting to guerilla warfare, finally annihilated the alien army. For nine long years, they supported and gave protection to the king. Hardly anything is known of the heroism and endurance of these little-known forest-dwellers.

Chapter Two

Tribalism in India

8 The Khasis of Meghalaya

Meghalaya consists of two divisions, the Khasi hills and the Jaintia hills. The Khasis inhabit the former and the Jaintias the latter. This region is almost entirely hilly. Part of it in the south is covered with a volcanic mass below it, important coalflelds and extensive alternating sandstone and limestone quarries and the limestone caves. The Jaintia hills take the name from the Rajas of Jaintia who had their capital at Jaintiapur at the foot of the hills. They are also known as Syntengs and Puars. There are also other tribes which inhabit this region. However, the Khasis are taken as belonging to the Mon-Khamer group, and the only people in India now speaking that language.

The Khasis build their houses a little below the tops, generally in small depressions. There seems to be a taboo on the hill summit. They are deeply attached to their habitation and seldom change. All classes of people live together including the Siem (the head of the state), for the elite to live apart would be repugnant to the democratic Khasis.

The Khasi house is oval in shape and built of stone or wooden-plank walls, and consists of three rooms, a centre room, retiring room and a porch. One time nails were taboo, but not now. For the house-warming, three pieces of fish or even a piece of meat are tied to the ridge of the house pole, and the inmates jump to pull them down and

propitiate the Khasi deity Ka Siem Synshar. Feathers of the fowl are fixed to the centre post which must be made of the Khasi oak. The walls of some are plastered with mud as a protection against fire.

One of the cleverest Khasi tales explains the superior status of Khasi oral literature. During the great flood, two men were charged with saving their own script, one was a Khasi, the other a non-Khasi. The latter tied his precious sheet to a tuft of hair on his head. The Khasi, however, promptly swallowed his sheet!

Religion and Dieties

The Khasis believe in god the creator, U Blei Nong-Thaw, except that the people being matriarchal, they address the deity in the feminine. But, while they invoke the supreme god in times of trouble, and at sacrifices, there is no special worship offered to him. They believe in the world of the dead defined as the house or garden of god where there are groves of betel-nut trees, but don't believe in hell or punishment after death. They believe there was a time when the world was youthful and without sin and men could communicate with their maker freely, that animals could also talk, so god, men and animals had friendly relations; that this harmony was destroyed by the selfishness of men who broke their troth with god. They, however, take comfort in the belief that god has given man religion as a means of restoring these broken ties. To them, religion is, therefore, much more than propitiating. They call it a way of figuring out, of judging, reasoning, in fact, a way of life. To them, therefore, all rituals, even prayers, are but an effort to find their way back to god.

A reference to man's falling from grace is always made in ceremonies where the invocation starts with: "My men have sinned." So god began creation again by first creating dog and then man.

Story of Creation and the Fall of Man

When god created heaven, mother earth had five children: sun, moon, water, air and fire. From the sun and moon came the constellations, and from the other three the things that cover the earth. The mother earth asked god for a ruler for the beautiful world he created. God thereupon selected seven out of the sixteen tribes dwelling with him, to descend to the earth and live there. (The Khasis, therefore, call themselves as the people of the seven huts and seven nests.) On this

occasion, god made a covenant with them that he would be in touch with them as long as they led good lives. The symbol of this troth was a tree.

It is said that an evil spirit from the sea, wanting to disturb this happy state, plotted man's downfall. He succeeded in convincing the people that the symbolic tree, which was growing huge, would menace them by filling the entire earth and plunging it into darkness, if it were not cut. After several failures, the tree was finally cut down. As it fell, the entire earth shook, and wherever its sap fell, it turned the sand into coal. Thus man brought disaster on himself. He lost his god, and life turned to ashes. But god took pity on these misguided souls and came down to help them start their life afresh, when the cock interceded for man. For, the animals and birds had escaped the curse. In recognition of this service, god gave the cock a gift of heralding each day by crowing.

God now taught man how to till the land and produce food, also the rites and ceremonies that go with the daily tasks. But god would not talk to man face to face, only through signs and symbols, and this could be possible only by strictly observing the rituals. He also promised that he would make his will known through the entrails of the cock and in the shells of the hen's egg.

The Khasis propitiate a number of deities and spirits. U'lu muluk, the god of the state, for whom rites are performed annually; U lei umtong, the god of water, used for drinking and cooking purposes and propitiated yearly for water to remain pure; U'lei longspah, the god of wealth, worshipped for prosperity; U Ryng kew is the village god who is propitiated whenever it seems necessary. Then each disease has a spirit that needs to be kept in good humour.

Ancestor worship by offering of food to the dead is an important ceremony. Formerly, this was done on flat stones, though now it has also shifted to the house. The idea behind this is that the welfare of the living depends on the well-being of the dead.

Ka Jawbei is the primeval ancestress of the clan, and many flat stones standing in front of monoliths in these hills are in her honour. Formerly, her intervention was sought on many occasions, especially to dissolve dissensions in the family or the clan by offering food to her on these stones.

Now it is customary to perform a sacrifice, for which first an augury is taken by breaking eggs to see from the broken shells if Ka Jawbei is offended. If so, they offer cotton cloth and a hen with

incantation chants to the beat of a drum. Rites are also performed to other household deities like Ka leiung and Ka firngam regarded in reality as Ka Jawbei in disguise. A strange fact to note is that though the Khasis are strongly matriarchal, U Thawlang is also worshipped when in distress, and besides the usual sacrifice, curiously enough the typical sleeveless coat, jymphong, is also offered.

The following incantation to U Thawlang is chanted at this rate called Kala Tap Thawlang:

> O father Thawlang, who has enabled me to be born, who gave me stature and life, I have wronged you. O father be not offended, for I have given a pledge and sign in the red and white sleeveless coat. I have offered the propitiatory cock that you may carry me in your arms and that I may be aware of you my father Thawlang.

Another important deity is U-Suid-nia, the first maternal uncle, Ka Jawbei's elder brother, who is honoured by a big upright central monolith stone. For, in a Khasi family, the maternal uncle, Keni, is not only influential but also the mother's manager. The Khasis, like all children of nature, worship various facets of it. To them hill is masculine, river feminine. There is a special ceremony with a long chant to the river goddess, Punatit, before fishermen cast their nets on it. For this, an altar is erected in the river mud, in the middle of which a bough of the Khasi oak is stuck, after which the sacrifice is offered. Almost immediately, all the boats lying in the creek shoot out to a long drawn out chant. Coolies will not carry their load across, they always throw them down, perform the rite and then proceed. The Khasis venerate hills and peaks as abodes of spirits who are propitiated by them.

A very significant and important ceremonial is divination by the use of cowries (shells), egg-breaking, etc. The egg-breaking is rather special. On a special board is placed a little heap of red earth at one side of the ledge, and the diviner or egg-breaker sits facing it with an egg on a small heap of rice in the middle. He then smears the egg with red earth to recitations of incantations, then sweeps the rice off the board and dashes the egg-against it with all his force. The practised throwing has to make the larger part of the egg shell called-*ka ligna* (the boat) fall in the middle of the board. The small bits which fall around are regarded as either good or evil spirits, according to the reading of the signs. For instance, those which fall on the right

side of the boat inside down augur good and vice versa. The bad omen suggests the displeasure of one of the hill deities for some offence by the father or the children. Where the pieces fall on the left with their inside down, they are favourable, if outside downwards, unfavourable. If pieces lie in line formation, it is supposed to indicate the road to the cremation, a sign of death. If four bits lie together, it is fatal, and so on it goes. It is understood that while the basic interpretation of the signs remain the same for all diviners, there are differences regarding minor points. There are one or two variations of this egg divination.

As the fowl plays such a significant role, it naturally enjoys a great degree of importance. In fact, it is referred to as a mediator between man and gods. The incantation reminds god of the critical role of this bird in the covenant arrived at between god and man, followed by a reference to the fowl as "the son of god who lays down his neck (life) for me man." This is interpreted as the substituting of human sacrifices which is once supposed to have prevailed by the offering of a cock which god accepted through a covenant.

Other mediums are also used for divination. One is the lime case. The diviner holds the lime case by the end of its chain and offers worship. He then puts a question, and if it swings, it is taken as yes. If it stays still, the answer is no. Another is the common method of picking up a handful of grains or cowries and counting. If the number is odd, it is good, if even, bad. There are several more simple ones like these.

The Khasis believe in the existence of a gigantic snake which needs to be appeased. It is said, only once it could be propitiated by human sacrifice. Here is the story of its origin.

There was once a cave near Cherrapunji where lived the mighty Theln, which kept devouring men and animals. One bold man determined to stop this sat down by the mouth of the cave offering meat to the snake, who now learnt to open its mouth wide when the man called it. Taking advantage of this, he one day dropped a ball of red hot iron into its mouth and killed it. Its body was then cut up and distributed widely and consumed, and the Theln was got rid of. But one piece remained out of which sprang countless Thelins who now continue to harass people. Once a Thelin has taken up its abode in a household, it never leaves it. It is, in fact, supposed to attach itself to property and bring prosperity, provided it is offered blood. Since its attachment is to property, it will go with it if it were sold or given

away. It also has the power of reducing itself to the size of a piece of thread, and can be securely put away in an earthen pot.

When rites are to be performed generally at midnight, all the family members gather around, beat a drum and call out the Thelin placing a tray for it. It is supposed to grow into a huge size and sit before the tray to be fed. If the family wants to get rid of it, all the property in the house has to be thrown away, and is not even supposed to be touched. So full of fear are the Khasis, that it is said some will not even mention it. It is assumed that this is a remanent of the once widely prevalent ancient serpent worship. It is said that in the olden days men voluntarily came forward to offer themselves for sacrifice, at the end of sharavan, declaring they were called by the goddess. On the ninth day of Durgapuja, the prospective sacrifice would be dressed up in new clothes and decked with a golden anklet, then he would offer his prayers, after which he would be executed.

The Khasi priest is known as Lyngdoh, and he has to be from that clan. His office is for his lifetime. He performs rites only for the community. In addition, he deals with social offences too. In some areas, he also functions as the siem (chief), and actually rules over the community, reminding one of the Pope in a miniature form. This is one interesting feature of the sacrifices which is compulsory, for without it, the sacrifice cannot take place. One may say that in a way he may also act as deputy on some occasions. This may be because of their matriarchal set up. For the high priestess of Nongkrem, is also the head of the state but, she may, of course, delegate some of her temporal powers to one of her sons or nephews and make him the siem.

When a Lyngdoh dies, his successor is appointed by the clan with complicated ceremonies. They proceed to the Shillong peak dancing all the way with everyone in their dance costume. In fact, dance is the most distinctive part of the whole ceremony. It is executed with sword and shield. Sometimes, a quiver of arrows is slung over the back, plumes of white and black in the turban, sometimes also a fly flap in the hand. A regular dance is executed which puts into one's mind the idea of war celebration. Under the tribal law, in certain areas they have also been revisionary legatees of those who died without female heirs. In some places, they could also take possession of the property of people whose houses were suspected of harbouring evil spirits. Often, such houses were burnt along with any furniture that might have been in that contaminated house.

Society, Social Events and Ceremonies

Khasi society has distinctive features of its own. Most of the clans trace their descent from ancestresses or great grandmothers, styled Ki Iuwbei Tynrai, literally grandmothers of the root. There is the saying: "From the woman sprang the clan." Thus the family is always traced back to the mother and the progeny as coming down from great or great great grandmother and as offsprings of one womb. Among some clans, the names of the ancestresses survive, some of which are quite alluring like Ka Nyap. She is greatly reverenced, deified one may say. The descendents of one ancestress, Ka Iawbei Tynrai, are called Kypoh Shikar or one clan. In the sub-clans are the descendents of one great grandmother, Ka Iawbei Tymmen, and styled as Shi Kpoh, issue of one womb. The next division is the *iing* (literally house) family. Invariably, the grandmother, her daughter, their children live under one roof; the grandmother being the head and styled as Iawbei Khynraw.

Boys are temporary inmates, so to say, for it is felt that they are lost when they marry. A husband is only a shong kha, a begetter. Some refer to a married man as u khan ki briew, someone else's son. Ritually the husband always remains a stranger, for he cannot participate in the family ceremonies nor can his ashes be put into his wife's clan tomb. For the sacred functions are in the hands of women.

Inheritance rights are enjoyed by women. Among the Khasis, the major part of these rights belongs to the youngest girl who "holds the religion", *Ka bat kansam*, that is, looks after all the rites. Her house is called "Kaiing Seny" as she claims the largest and most important share of the property, like the family-house and jewellery. But she cannot dispose of any of this without the consent of other sisters. They are entitled to a share too. They also have certain obligations like maintenance of the family property. The next in line of succession is the next youngest, and if she has no daughters, it goes to her sister's daughter. Amongst the Khasis, all the property earned by a man before his marriage goes to his mother, for it is supposed to belong to her clan, *kur*. But nowadays what he acquires after the marriage the wife and children can inherit, but even here the biggest share goes to the youngest daughter. In the absence of daughters, it is equally divided amongst the sons. If there is no female issue, a girl from another family may be invited to perform the ceremonies,

and thus come to have a claim on the property, a kind of adoption, and then assuming all rights. The lack of a successor is a very serious matter, for then there is no one to place the bones in the family tomb.

In their legends too, women play a dominant role. There is a tale of Ka law-Iaw who established a village in the Khasi hills. Here she came to be known as law-shibdi, as she paid twenty cowries a day to every one she engaged to put up a market. She is also credited with having introduced iron smelting and implements, which she sent even for sale in the plains market. She is also said to have bred a herd of animals. Due to outside attacks, the family broke up and got scattered in various directions, each founding its own clan. Thus these various clans claim an ancestress and may have a tomb each.

Ownership of Land

Among the hill tribes, the Khasis are outstanding in their agricultural operations. They are thoroughly aware of the use of natural manures, far more advanced than any in that region. They show an enlightened attitude in their treatment, carefully adjusting to the productive power of the soil and their assessment of the staple. It is a joy to see the meticulously cultivated terraced rice-fields and the carefully irrigated land. The other crops like potatoes, millets, chillies are grown on the hill sides.

What is equally of crucial importance is that amongst the Khasis, the land ultimately belongs to the people. Because the people are the offsprings of the state and, therefore, have a claim on their land, whether the plots are owned by families, clans or the state itself. Land in the Khasi hills is classified as follows: Ka Ki Siem or Raj, the chief's or crown land for support of the ruling family. But the rulers were precluded from levying taxes on land or the persons farming, in short, there was no landlord-tenant relationship. Ka Ri Lyngdoh were lands for the support of the *Lyngdohs* (priests). On some of this, rice is given for use in state rituals. Interestingly and quite logically, there are special lands reserved exclusively for the village called Ri Shnong—village lands. They are reserved to supply thatching grass, fire wood and the like to the village. These lands can sometimes be cultivated by local farmers but without any change in titles. Ki lawkyntang is a land on which the sacred groves stand. It is an offence to cut these trees held sacred. Their ownership lies with the village.

The private lands belong to a clan managed by the maternal uncle. He is the heir to the main clan. The clan ownership is the largest. In the latter, service lands are given rent-free to the administrative officials. Then, there are also the village puja lands, the rent on which is used for performance of the various religious rituals in the village. No tax is paid on them.

Re Kynti are private lands acquired individually or through inheritance in case of a woman. Though strictly land acquired by a man reverts to his mother on his death and not the children, he can leave it to his children if he got the property after his marriage, either by a will or informally. But this land will have to be regulated after this according to the traditional law, since inherited property can be owned only by women. Menfolk may work on these lands, but the produce has to be handed over to their mother who can distribute it.

Ordinary disputes are sought to be settled in the first instance by a compromise. If that fails, the durbar council is summoned through a crier who in a strange archaic form calls the people to the assembly. *Shong Khang*, the summons, is quaint and is worth a reproduction:

> Thou fellow villager, fellow creature, thou old man, thou grown up, thou young, thou boy, thou child, thou infant; thou who art little, thou great. Ha! because there is a contest. Ha! to cause to sit together cause to deliberate. Ha! to give intelligence together. Ha assemble in Ha listen attentively. Hei ye are forbidden to stop to draw water, not to cut firewood, to go as coolies, to go to work, to go on a journey. Hei! he who has a puch, he who has a bug, now come forth, now appear. Hei! the hearing then is to be all together. Hei! list destruction has come, list wearing away has overtaken us. Kaio! come forth now fellow mates.

Treating this lightly would bring a penalty. The site for this is marked by flat stones. The complainant and respondent each throws a turban on the ground or a bag of betel-nuts and leaves as pledges of the party. There are pleaders called "riw said" on both sides who set forth their cases in lengthy speeches. Witnesses are examined. The most awesome form of oath is sworn on *U klong*, a liquor gourd. The chief is a judge, and the assembly the jury. The sentence usually demands a fine and a pig for sacrifice to *Ka bi synshar*, goddess of the state. This verdict is called out by the siem thus: "Is it not so

young people?" And the answer is given, "Yes it is so young people" by the people.

In the olden days a perplexing case was decided by ordeal in water, that is, he who stayed under water the longest won. The most dreaded is by U Klong. Because of the terror it arouses, it is never even suggested and resorted to only where both the parties on their own offer to undergo it. It involves a gourd of fermented rice and an arrow stuck in it with a barbed iron head. The presiding person invokes the goddess: "Come down and bear witness, and judge. If this man's cause bc unrighteous, he shall lose his life, lose his clan, his family. If his cause be righteous, he shall be well, prosperous, live long."

Birth of a Child

The naming ceremony of a Khasi child is quite a complicated affair. Some women pound rice into flour and place it on a bamboo winnower. Fermented rice is mixed with water and placed in a gourd. Powdered turmeric and five pieces of dried fish are spread on a plantain leaf. The pot with the placenta is kept in the middle room. If the baby is a boy, a bow and three arrows and the implements of a Khasi warrior are kept beside him; if it is a girl, a cane head strap used for carrying loads. An elderly man puts a plantain leaf on the floor and sprinkles water on it. Those gathered there mention a few names for the child, and ask the old man to repeat them as he takes the gourd in his hand and calls god to witness. He keeps pouring out liquor from it until a few drops remain. The name mentioned as the last drop struggles out is given to the child. After this, the child's father picks up the pot which is covered with rice flour and fermented rice, waves it thrice over the child and then hangs the pot on a tree outside the village. This implies a belief in a close link between the body and its after birth, and this is sought to be preserved in the belief that it will reunite with that body after the person's death. And during the lifetime, this link should never be broken. After returning, someone helps him wash his feet before entering, and then holds the rice flour to his mouth three times. Two people hold the dried fish at its two ends and break it into two. The powdered turmeric, mixed with rice flour and water, is applied to the right foot of the father, the mother and the child. The people assembled are anointed, but the turmeric is applied only to their left foot. The bow, arrow

and the head strap are carefully tucked into the inner surface of the thatch on the roof. Rice flour is later distributed to all those present. After a couple of months, the ears of the child are bored and ear-rings put, called *ki Shashkor Iawbei* ear-rings of the great grandmother.

Death

When someone dies, a family member puts his lips at the dying person's ear, and calls out his name thrice to make sure the person is dead. The corpse has to be bathed in hot water from three earthen pots and then draped in white, and the waistband and the turban have to be folded from left to right not the normal right to left. An egg is placed on the stomach and nine fried corn grains are tied round the head on a string. The body is also decked with jewellery. A cock is then sacrificed, as it has to scratch a path for the dead spirit on the journey. An animal is sacrificed if it is a woman. A piece of the fowl's left leg and the lower part of the jaw is placed later in the receptacle, while pieces of the sacrificial flesh are hung in a basket right over the corpse's head along with some eatables, betel-nuts and water. This process is renewed as long as the corpse remains under the roof. There are celebrations each night, guns fired, drums beaten and flutes played. The number of nights the body is kept in the house has to be odd, not even, usually it is three.

When the body is laid on a bamboo bier, clothes are tied crossways if it is a male or in a parallelogram if it is a woman. Some money has to be kept for the dead to buy necessities. Before the funeral starts, there is a purifactory ceremony when rice and water are thrown outside. It moves to the sound of drums and gun salutes, sometimes even copper coins being scattered along the road. The egg resting on the stomach is thrown on the pyre towards the feet. All the articles kept around the body, like eatables, etc., are gathered and placed at the head of the pyre, and the bier is broken into pieces. Then three arrows called, Kinam Tympem, are shot—one each in the direction of north, south and east. The three arrows used at the funeral correspond to the three arrows placed at the time of birth.

Before leaving the place, people throw betel-nuts on the pyre saying: "Goodbye and eat betel-nuts-in the house of god." The bones are collected in a white cloth by the female relatives, while an old family member throws powdered rice on the ground from a leaf, calling on

the dead not to trouble the clan or the family as all the rites have been duly performed.

The party then proceeds to the stone cairn-*maw shieng*. Someone goes in front strewing berries, leaves and rice along the path. The one carrying the bones must look and move straight ahead, without turning his head even sideways. If a stream has to be crossed, a rough bridge is made of branches and grass to enable the spirit to reach the cairn.

The bones are placed in an earthen pot, its mouth tied with a white cloth. Then the low jawbone of the animal and the leg of the fowl, together with three pieces of the hard yolk of an egg, are added and placed with the pot inside a small stone cairn known as maw shieng. On the top of the cairn are kept eatables and betel-nuts. The cairn is visited for three days to look for traces of footprints and to leave fresh food. The door of the deceased's house is left open day and night, in case the spirit wishes to visit the old haunts. These three days are taboo and no work can be done. It is only later that three eggs are broken to learn the cause of the death. Because of the delay in the cremation, these tribals have devised various methods of embalming, some very complicated like shutting in the body inside the hollow of a tree trunk and immersing it in spirit and lime water, and then drying it. Once it is said honey was used for embalming, but has evidently been abandoned because of the market demand for honey.

Later the bones and ashes are deposited in the bone repository known as mawphew which belongs to each branch of the clan. Ultimately, however, they are placed in the clan sepulchre, mawbah, with a big ceremony. However, there has to be amity and peace within the clan before this is undertaken. An egg is broken to ascertain an auspicious day for this rite, when the bones are brought to the clan worship place, ing seng, the bones of the male separately tied in a white bundle from those of the female, and carried reverently by two women close to their breast. There walks a man scattering leaves and rice along the path ahead of them. If a stream has to be crossed, a string or long grass is tied from one side to the other to enable the departed spirit to cross.

At the place of worship, the bones are laid on two richly decorated beds, and a sacrifice offered and then hung up in a basket in the house. There is a dance that night in the house by two women, one from the deceased's clan and the other an outsider. Subsequently,

there is a big dance which may last as long as even nine days, always an odd number. The dancers carry effigies, one of the first ancestress Ka Jawbei, the other U Suidnia, the first maternal uncle.

A day before the grand rite, Beh-Tympew, driving out the devils is performed to prevent disturbances on the final journey. Two shallow tanks are prepared to purify the bones of those who died a violent death or those who died far off whose ceremonies could not be performed according to custom. A plantain tree and a bamboo with three rings, supposed to act as summons to the departed spirits, are attached. This was the form of summoning used by the rulers to summon their subjects in the olden days. A special ceremony is observed for those who died childless. All along the path two lines of upright stones are set up on this journey to serve as resting places for the spirits.

Each bundle is kept on a richly bedecked bed at the ossuary, the woman's on the left and the man's on the right. Food and liquor are offered on a stone after that at the entrance. As the door closes, a flag is fixed on it and men perform a ceremonial dance thrice with shields and swords. Then, all but three men depart. One of the three attends to the sacrifice, the second sits behind it, the third shakes three firebrands, crowing thrice like a cock, and the man behind listens attentively for any sound from within. It is believed that if the ceremonies have not been properly performed, the tomb trembles. This is known as Tanding. If the tomb is still and silent, it means all is well. The head of the worship distributes the sacrificial meat, and blesses all the assembled clan members.

The Khasi country is noted for its memorial stones. In Khasi, *kynmaw* literally means "to mark with stone," and is the expression used to say "to remember." Normally, memorial stones are in honour of the dead. But in the Khasi land, one comes across a variety of them like Maomluh, the salt stone, from which salt is scraped and eaten off a sword as a form of oath; Maosmai, the oath stone; Mowplang, the grass stone, and so on. Upright stones are also placed along the pathway to the tomb known as Mawlynti, the stone of the way; or Mawkfat, the stone set up at each place they halted for the night. The Mawbynna stone commemorates a parent or close relation and has table stones in front. Finally, there are the Maw-shongthait, stones erected for weary travellers to rest. These have often vertical stones by the side, some quite high like the ones in Nartiang hat (that is market) which is twenty-seven and feet high two and half feet thick.

Maw-unkoi marks the position of tanks whose water is used for cleansing bones of those who died an unnatural (by accident or volient) death. The table stones are there for food for the dead, which the clan people can place on them.

The cromlechs, flat stones, resting on two upright ones are normally found in the vicinity of menhirs and table stones, as the two are intimately connected. The latter, which are memorial stones, are erected when the bones are to be deposited in the clan's cineraria. The cinerarias are built of stone blocks or stone platforms, made in a variety of shapes, some large, some oblong, some square or circular. They don't have doors or outlets as the spirit has to be securely confined within.

Dance

Dance and song are an intimate feature of Khasi existence, and a part of every event in life. The valleys seem to ring for ever with the music of pipes and drums. The most important is the Nongkrem performed every year for five days, known as Shad Nongkrem, the national dance. It is performed at Smit, the royal residence of the *siem-sad*, siem-mothers, of the Khyrim Kingdom of the Khasis at Shillong. She embodies in a unique way the complete matriarchal structure, for she is a combination of a queen and high priestess of the state, a custodian of age-old religious usages and ancient festivals. A curious departure from the prevailing pattern is that the office of the Siem descends here through the eldest daughter, as opposed to the law of inheritance.

The dance dates around May, and is proclaimed in the traditional way by sending a ring of bamboo to all the Khasi hill villages as a summons to the dance. The number of knots in the ring indicates the number of days ahead for the festival. The five dance days coincides with the five most important market days, Wednesday to Sunday. Nevertheless, religion is at the core of this grand performance; it is part of a ceremonial called Pomblang, performed by the Siem of Khyrim to Ka Blei Synshar, the ruling goddess, to secure her blessings for the success of the crop and prosperity of the state. The most important rite performed on the inaugural Wednesday night is the invocation of U Lei Shillong, the founder of Lei Long Siem, ancestress of the Siem clan and its first maternal uncle. Then is worshipped Biskorom, accompanied by a ceremonial dance by men with swords and shields.

Thursday prayers are offered to Ka Blei Synshar, the goddess of justice. On this occasion, the dance is led by the Khasi's traditional priests, Soh Blei and Lyngdohs, once again around the Rishot Blei with music which the Seim also joins. The Nohkjat, described as the virgin dance, is done in the early hours of the morning by unmarried girls of the Siem's family, richly dressed, wearing a profusion of gold, coral and bead necklaces, and other ornaments all over the body. The dance is slow and subtle, the bodies move majestically, hands still and the feet lift almost imperceptibly, while the arms are held down to the sides and the eyes lower softly. The women's dance is known as Ka Shad Kynthin. Men of the royal family also join the dance in a semi-circle waving fly whisks. This dance is done inside the Ling Sad, the residence of the Siem Sad, royal mother. As the day breaks, the dance shifts to the royal courtyard and is carried on there. At the final community dance, only men are allowed to dance, no women except unmarried girls strike a strange note. Another curious feature is that women never raise their hands, only their bodies move slowly with their feet. They wear heavy jewellery. Moreover, women dance in the inner circle while men dance on the outer fringe. The men's dance, done with clash and clatter, seems like a remanent of the old war dance and is called Shad Mastiah. Men are equally gay in their plumes of black and white feathers, and brandish swords and shields moving at a fast pace. They also wear their turbans proudly. It has a history behind it. In the 8th century, a Kashmir king, Laladitya, invaded Assam but was defeated by the Khasi queens. When peace was restored, the Khasis gave their princess to the Kashmir prince—an occasion when the Khasis were presented with at urban each. Ever since, turbans have been fashioned after that historic one. At the final rites of the Shad Nongkrem or Pomblang Nongkrem, as this festival is called, the Siem removes his turban when he offers the last prayers for the welfare of the Siem and its people.

The Khasis have a dance festival in spring called Shad Suk Mynsiem, dance with a peace of mind, and a sound and joyful heart which is a more of a community celebration than a religious rite. The site is lovely spot called Welking, lying on the bank of a stream. The festival lasts for three days, starting with a short performance as a prelude called Shad noh Khat. The Khasis say and elderly people declare that it has been their experience that weather remains fine all through these three days. Basically, the dance and its setting are the same for all the dances. It seems full of life and splendour with

colourful costumes and the lustre of the ornaments. The most significant item is the crown women wear. It is made of circlets of gold or silver, ornamented with filigree work. On the part of the crown which rests at the back of the wearer is a spike some six inches long and has a flower made of the same metal attached to it upwards. This is a copy of Teiwlaseebon, a beautiful flower of a fine light yellow texture and lovely scent, found only in the most inaccessible spots and regarded by the Khasis as a symbol of beauty and purity. An ornament peculiar to the Khasis is the rupatylli, a silver collar. It is flat and broad, and allowed to hang down over the neck in front, secured by fastening it behind. The most significant item in the men's attire is the silver quiver of silver arrows that hangs at the back of the wearer.

Only the unmarried girls dance to and fro in the inner circle with gentle and soft foot movements. The male dancers, with steps that are more lively to watch, dance round the maiden's circle waving the fly flaps they hold in their right hands. The mixed dance, which is the chief function of the day, comes to a close at sunset. The male dancers perform in pairs the warrior dance called Shad Mastiah with swords in their hands. They dance all the way while leaving the Seng Khasi hall accompanied by the pipers and drummers followed by the entire crowd.

Shad Suk Mynstem is a unique dance by itself called the thanksgiving. The Shad Suk Mynstem has a special significance as the name indicates, namely, to bring together all the people of this state to enjoy and experience a collective sense of comradeship and peace, and also to express gratitude to god for his blessings in the past and solicit them for the future, hence the association of thanksgiving.

Amongst the four principles specified by their ancestors and adhered to by them is the association and assembly of those who upheld the tenets of kinship. This festival is held under the auspices of Seng Khasi, an institution founded by the Khasis in 1899 to propagate Khasi culture, religion and customs.

There is an attractive dance by men called Ka Shad Lymmoh, performed holding leafy branches in their hands. Thus dancing forms a part of all functions and ceremonies. It is a feature of the rites when bones are placed on the tomb, as it is of ceremonials at the market to solicit success in trade for the prosperity of the state.

Musical Instruments

Ka duitara is a guitar with muga silk strings which is played with a little wooden key held in the hand. There are other versions of this. Ka Maryn god is much the same as the duitara, but played with a bow like a violin. The third kind is Ka Marynthing which has only one string, and is played with the finger. Ka Tangumuri is a wooden pipe played like a flageolet. They also play the jews' harp of bamboo. Ka Kynshaw are bell metal cymbals. Ka Sheirati is a flute played only at funerary rites. They also have quite a few drums made only of wood.

Games

The Khasis indulge in a number of games, but their favourite and what may be termed a national game is archery. The following is a small and spicy legend to explain its origin. The first Khasi woman taught her two sons archery, but warned them never to lose their temper over the game. Thus archery originated for them right in the beginning of their life.

To them, it is a most exciting preoccupation and full of challenges, for it is common for villages to challenge one another. This is quite an affair. On each side, there is a man called Nong Khan Khanam (literally one who arrests the arrow). Curiously enough, this is sought to be done not by pitting the talents of two sides against each other but by these men uttering spells and reciting the weak spots of the opposition. It is also done through their power to make the arrows miss their marks.

These men also act as some kind of umpires, when conditions like the number of arrows to be shot by each archer, identification marks to be given to each side, the size of the stakes, etc., are to be decided. The targets are surprisingly enough small bundles of grass called U Slum. Sometimes the targets are also from the root of a plant called Ka Soh Pdung. Each one has the right to decide on his own target. On the day of contest, each umpire sits in front of his target with a hollow bamboo full of water in his hand, the bow and arrows laid beside the targets. The umipire then repeats all the conditions, invokes the aid of the primeval woman, Ka meika nong hu kum, then repeats the incantations, mentions the several flaws in the opposite contseting party, pouring water at intervals from the bamboo in front of

the target. When the actual shooting starts amidst shouts and feverish excitement, with the supporters of each side exhorting its side and the competitors leaping with joy in the air every time a target is hit. At the end of the day, whoever has the largest number of hits wins. Large wagers are also-made on either side.

Chapter Two

Tribalism in India

9 The Sansis of Punjab

The Sansis, it is said, derive their name from their Rajput ancestor of the same name whom they call Raja Sansmal, who is now amongst the most important deity worshipped by them. According to the Sansi legend, the rise and growth of this tribe is traced to Sansi's progeny Mahla and Beehdoo, and daughter Raslaan. They also call themselves Bhatus in their dialect. Historically, they are really Bhatti Rajputs who were driven out of Rajasthan by Muslim invaders under Allauddin Khilji around 1303. They seem to have wandered all over Punjab eking out a precarious livelihood, passing through many vicissitudes for nearly two centuries. In course of time, some of them settled down on land, acquired status and influence, and even reared kingdoms by getting absorbed into local communities, adopting indigenous caste names and ultimately embracing the Sikh religion. Maharaja Ranjit Singh is taken as a descendent of one such noble family.

The Sansis are divided into two principal clans named after their two famous ancestors, Mahla and Beehdoo. Thus, during ancestral worship, they invariably say, "O Sansmal Sansi, Mahla, Beehdoo, kindly bless our community with peace." When two Sansi strangers meet they ask, "O brother, do you belong to Mahla or Beehdoo?"

There is an interesting interlude in the relationship between the two brothers. Beehdoo was once grazing cattle in the jungle when he spotted a particular branch of a tree which he desired for a stick.

Since he did not have his axe with him, he postponed the cutting. While returning home, he told his brother of this desirable wood. Mahla grew greedy, and while his brother slept, he went up to the tree to cut the branch and make a stick, and then hide it. When Beehdoo returned to his coveted tree, the branch was missing. Later, when he saw the stick in Mahla's hands, he snapped his relations with him saying, "You are neither a brother nor a Sansi, for no Sansi would behave like this. As you betrayed our relationship for a *chhari* (stick) you become a chhari, and have no relationship with me or other Sansis." On this the entire community split into two, each supporting a brother.

Raslaan, the wise sister, however, intervened at a community gathering where she pressed the two warring parties to reunite in the larger interests of the whole community. They bowed in acceptance, and Mahla paid a penalty to the aggrieved brother. The community assembly was made into a permanent body called Raas after the lady who had initiated it.

The two most influential of the Bhatti Sansi tribe were Kirti Sansi and Raja Sansi, who founded the town of Raja Sansi near Amritsar about 1570.

The Sansis call their sub clans, *deras*, meaning temporary encampment under a leader, as they lived thus for many years. As the camp community overflowed, some sought new lands and pastures to settle. Nevertheless, each sub clan clung on to its original name. The administration was carried on through a panch Raas. They were carefully chosen for their intelligence, wisdom and, above all, honesty. There was a right of appeal available to any party that felt aggrieved. A decisive irrefutable argument was called badal and a badal could decide in a few moments even a complicated case of long-standing.

If the panchas had difficulty in getting at the truth, resort was made to an ordeal either by water or fire, called binda. The very thought of binda would drive people to confessing the truth. A great sanctity is attached to this. The litigants must lead a strict and austere life during this period. The party's wife should not get pregnant, as that would make him impure for this highly surcharged performance. For the diving ordeal, the litigant can select his toba, the diver. The divers are confined to separate rooms three days before binda in strict seculsion. They wear a long thick veil over their faces. An attendant called Brahman is attached to the diver during the period he is blindfolded. No one else is permitted to touch him.

On the appointed day, they are taken to a pond which must have at least chest-deep water. Two poles are fixed eight to ten yards apart, and each stands beside the other invoking the deities. The panchas supervising, ask the complainant to throw a piece of jaggery into the water over the head of his diver, which he does. Then the accused is made to do the same. If the piece breaks in the air as it flies through, the thrower is suspected guilty, but no judgement is passed. The divers then dip deep, holding on to the pole until they are submerged to stay there for sometime. Whoever emerges first, his client is judged guilty and has to pay a penalty—taking the shape of money or cattle or grain, ornaments or even service. After the whole affair is over, the Sansis offer *gur*, jaggery, in the name of their ancestors, and the issue is taken as closed. This is known as gur tapana, which is also done while excommunicating a person or breaking off relations with anyone.

Social Events: Marriage

The first rite is gandhin, fixing of the marriage date, which is a sort of a ritual. The girl's father invites the boy's party, and after feasting, the former hands his guests some red and yellow coloured threads called mauli, with seven knots on them. It is obviously a relic of the days when people were not able to write numerals, and counting was done with the help of knots. This ceremony, by implication, should be seven days before the main ritual, hence the seven knots.

At the maiyan ceremony, a strange custom is to place coins under the groom's feet to be given later to a barber woman. That night, when the boy is supposed to be asleep, women apply *mehandi*, red-leaf paste, on him, and call it *chori*, stealing as this is supposed to be done without his knowledge. Probably, he is expected to pretend to be asleep. From now on, he keeps a sword or an iron stick at hand all the time to keep off evil spirits.

In a Sansi wedding, a canopy of heavily embroidered cloth done in phulkari style is used instead of a thatch of leaves, as elsewhere. The groom sits on a stool while water is brought in a procession with the accompaniment of music and singing to give him a ceremonial bath. Afterwards, he has to be coaxed and lured to come off the bath stool by what is called a *Mamadan*, gift from the maternal uncle, or has to be promised, at least, a cow or buffalo, as per his wish. In front of him are piled a heap of earthen pitcher lids called chasnis. Having

made sure of his gift, he makes a leap on the heap of lids and smashes them gleefully, for a complete smash is taken as a good omen. The ceremony is known as Khaara.

The groom has to give away all his old clothes to the barber. The father offers an invocation to God Sansmal, and Mahla and Beehdoo to bless the wedding as he places the crown on the bridegroom's head. Thereafter, the groom enters the state of groomhood.

A unique feature is that both the bride and the groom go through the same rites, but separately. The sisters, sisters-in-law, young maidens gather near the *ghori*, mare, which is to take the groom to the bride's place, the former holding its reins. As he mounts, they keep on feeding the animal, and will not relinquish the reins or let it move until they are given some gifts. The role of the ghori in a marriage has led to wedding songs being called ghoriyans. When he dismounts at his destination, he goes in a procession accompanied by girls to the jand tree, a wild thorny plant, made famous by the well known Punjabi romance, Mirza-Sahiban. Here the *mauli*, coloured threads, have been tied to a branch which the groom has to cut at one blow with a sword he has been carrying since the maiyan ceremony. If he fails, he has to try again until it is cut off.

When the party reaches the bride's house, it sits out for sometime, for the bride's father will first ask: "How and when have you come?" In reply, the boy's father has to unfold his entire lineage to prove he is a true Sansi, descended from Mahla-Beehdoo ancestry so that the marriage is established as legitimate.

Then there is a ceremony called Gotakmala regarded as most important by Sansis. In fact, no Sansi woman can expect to be accepted by her in-laws without having gone through it. The term is derived from gotaclan or sub-clan, and nivala, morsel of food. On this occasion, women from both households eat together with the bride from the same platter.

The actual ceremony, however, starts when a bath-pit is dug. After midnight, seven green sticks of either beri or cotton tree are fixed round the pit at regular distances, and seven mauli threads are wrapped round them and some coins thrown in, water is also filled in to enable the water goddess to witness the marriage. Some also have lamps of dough, lit with ghee or even fire fed by ghee, all to enable fire to be a witness.

Bride-price, so integral a part of tribal marriage complex, is sternly frowned on by the Sansis. But if the girl's father pleads his poverty to

feed even a marriage party, cash equivalent of seven sheep is permitted by the panchayat, called haath.

An interesting interlude is provided when all sit down to eat. The purpose is to delay serving certain dishes for fun called jangbandi. Young girls from the bride's party sing couplets and name the dishes; they can only be served when return couplets are recited to undo the jangbandi. Only then can the meals be eaten. Failing that, a penalty has to be paid by the defeated party. The people from the bride's side also indulge in light-hearted satires. Here are a few samples:

We have a maize flower in our house, but the foolish bridegroom,
Son of an eloped mother demands grain from us.
The grain is parching—hearth is not at work.
O shameless, you have no shame at all.
Our bride is delicate like the wire of gold. The bridegroom seems a potter.
The couple does not behove.
O shameless, you have no shame.

A turban-size cloth, with seven knots tied in it and a rupee inserted in the central knot, is tied round the groom's waist like a belt. The bride enters wearing a veil. They both circumambulate seven times. The groom holds an iron pitcher containing water on his head, while she follows him holding on to his cloth belt with her right hand, and women keep singing. On the bride's entering the house, she is made to sit first just inside the threshold holding her fist closed. The groom stands outside holding on to the pitcher with one hand, while he is called upon to open the bride's fist with the other and, at the same time, avoids spilling any water from his pitcher. This impossible situation provides a lot of amusement. After this the *Kamarkassa*, the cloth belt, is untied and given to the bride who has to carry it respectfully to her in-laws. But she keeps the rupee with her from the central knot.

At the groom's house, there are several rites, some quite playful. One consists of the couple putting cracked wheat into each other's hands over and over again, and is said to signify the oneness of their economic life. They touch each other then with their foreheads and then join their soles together. This is called joban—the final act of this long drawn-out drama. When the bride is to leave her parental home, women sing this parting song:

O! My dear father, keep me for a night more.
O! My dear daughter, I cannot keep you any more.
Why can't you keep me for a night more in your house,
Where I have passed whole of my life;
My dear daughter I cannot keep you tonight,
Being bound by my dharma, pledge and social bindings.

Here are some of the typical folk songs of the Sansis:

My daughter, the grains of gram are in my basket,
I hear you speaking, but who else is whispering with you?
My dear mother, they are legs of my palang,
I am singing and the other sound is that of my spinning wheel.

Where should I put kajjal or surma,
My eyes are completely filled with true love.

Dhola of spinning wheel:

Beautiful spinning wheel, work, work and work hard,
You have four senses—senses of sight, smell, hearing, and taste.
Fifth sense is directly concerned with your body which will also perish.
Work humbly, as thousands of spinning wheels like you have perished in pride.
Those who are indifferent to their duty will repent in the next world,
Foolish people do not understand this hint,
Remember god, His name will light your dark body.

The bundas are hanging in my ears, the chhattas are long and luring.
They hang or prick my forehead with some amorous secret,
Their touch and feel travel to the whole of my body,
If you were not able to bear the burden of love, you should not have shouldered it,
My love with Dhol began in infancy, even the preacher talks of it in the mosque,
I am like Heer, who was intoxicated with ishq like a drunkard,
Please come soon, my end is imminent.

As in so many cases, the venomous Criminal Tribes Act was made applicable to the Sansi tribes too with disastrous results. They were charged with affiliations with the Mazabhi thugs, though this was never proved. Actually, Mazabhi is the term used for scavengers and, at no time did the Sansis enrol or identify themselves with that group. It can never be repeated too often that crime is not confined to any one particular class or community. It is definitely not hereditary. But a community can be conditioned, especially a young growing generation who are made to be born as suspects, by branding them as criminals and closing other opportunities to them. In Punjab, the police had introduced a system of roll call, though completely illegal, even before the introduction of this act.

Chapter Two

Tribalism in India

10 The Mahadev Kolis of Maharashtra

ORIGIN

The Mahadev Kolis are found in the region of Sahyadri, commonly dedicated to Mahadev. There is an erroneous notion that all Kolis are fisherman, for they get tangled up with the nomenclature "Kolis," who are normally fishing folk. Mahadev Kolis have, however, been keepers of fort.

Among their traditional claims to ancestry is Valmiki, the writer of the Ramayana, and a spot in Randha village has been fixed as Valmiki's hermitage, now known as *tatobacha math*, grandfather's hermitage. Historically, there are many references in Marahta records, particularly during the Peshwa period, of forts being taken over from the Kolis.

The Kolis have a short tale of why the sky is so high in the heavens. Once the sky was very low. One day a vigorous Koli woman was sweeping her compound when she brandished her broom so forcefully that it pushed the sky up from its normal position. It began to rush further up. Another woman tending her cow the same time found it straying further away. So she called out by its name "Abhali," which also means the sky. The latter hearing its name called, stopped immediately. And now the name has stuck.

Religion And Deities

Every village has its *gramdeva*, deity of the village. The image does not seem to need a temple, it can be worshipped anywhere, usually under a tree. There is a strange custom among them of changing old images, even the images in *panchaloha*, of five metals, the old ones being buried and new installed.

A deity very special to them is Vaghoba or Vaghdeva, tiger-god, whose image is carved in wood, rarely in stone, and stands behind a Maruti (Hanuman) temple. A special day is dedicated to Vaghoba. There are a few Vagaoba temples, most likely in places which were troubled by tigers. A tree is pointed out as a tiger scraper, Vaga Khetan, as they call it. It is a tree against which the tiger has scraped itself. They believe that if the tail of an animal touches it, it will get paralyzed forthwith. The boy tending animals must immediately cry "hule, hule" to get the animal out quickly, if there is any such danger.

High in the Kolis' pantheon also comes Hirava, who has a following among other tribals around, like the Warlis and Thakurs. His symbol is a bunch of peacock feathers. This has to be renewed every ten or fifteen years as the filaments of feathers drop off. On this occasion, it is obligtaory to hold a celebration called "Gondhal," with the usual sacrifices. A special feature of this is the playing of an instrument "Dhak," which is done by the Mahadev Kolis alone. Kanastri is the counterpart of Hirava, her image being in bronze and made to represent the ear of the corn with five prongs. She is usually installed and invoked when agricultural operations go wrong.

Festivals

The festivals peculiar to the Mahadev Kolis is vagh baras, "tiger's twelfth," celebrated as the name indicates, in honour of the tiger on the twelfth, the bright half of the lunar month of Kartik. In this festival, the principal participants are the cowherds. They go around the village a day before the festival, collecting uncooked food material, mostly rice or wheat. On the festival day, they go out into the jungle and prepare *khir*, sweet milk, with the collected stuff. While the cooking is on, some draw a picture of a tiger on a stone with red lead. When khir is ready, the cowherds divide themselves into two groups, the tiger's and the guards'. The tiger's side tries to steal the khir, while the other tries to prevent this, during which some of the hot stuff is

splashed on the backs of the boy's of the tiger's side. After this scalding, all feast on the khir. Next vagh baras is observed in the dark half of the month when the same is repeated, but fish is substituted for the khir.

There is another version of this when pulses and pumpkins are also collected along with cereals and cooked by unmarried girls of the village. The cooked food is brought on a boy's head, who is decked with flowers in his cap. He goes round a tree five times, puts the food down and runs off to a stream, while he is pelted by the pumpkin rind. When he sits down, they feast on the food.

In the month of vaishak, the beginning of summer, there is the festival of Akshamya Tritiya, the imperishable third, as its name indicates. It comes on the bright third and is a composite festival with complex significance. They believe that at this time, their dead ancestors visit them and then return to their abode. To facilitate their return to heaven, each side of the front door has a small staircase with a few steps made of cowdung and rested against the wall. Where a staircase cannot be made, five marks of turmeric or sandalwood paste are made, one above the other to symbolize the steps. Those whose both parents are dead bring two fresh earthen pots, one "kara" and the other "keli." They are filled with water and rice, and worshipped by the man and wife of the house. If the father alone is dead, only the "kara" is kept, if the mother alone is dead, then only 'keli' is worshipped. A sweet *roti*, baked wheat-bread, is eaten on this occasion.

Another pitar-pat, ancestor worship, is observed also in their honour in Bhadrapad, around September, for a fortnight. On the day of its observance, before taking food, a piece of live charcoal is placed outside the front door on one side. The performer of the ceremony then proceeds from the house to the place where the live charcoal is placed, dropping rice, corn and a little ghee on the way through a hole made in a piece of unleavened bread. Then he drops some rice, corn and a little ghee on the charcoal itself, and leaves it at some place from where it may be taken away by a crow or eaten by a mouse. In some houses, vigil is kept all night by having a folk drama performance. On the last day of the fortnight, the meal has to be taken before noon. It is also the last meal for the day. They believe that the doors of heaven close early on that day, and the manes might get stranded if they are late.

Along the Konkan coast, the Akshagya Tritiya is differently

observed, and seems to have in it some elements of a festival called Chaitra Gauri, worship of Goddess Parvati, rather than something connected with the manes. About seven days before the festival, six kinds of grain, including wheat and maize, are sown in a basket and kept under another basket, and watched everyday for the seeds to sprout. Women sing special songs everyday called gauri songs. The basket and the shoots are also called gauri, and both are yellow. On the Akshagya Tritiya day, when the shoots have come up, these baskets are carried on the head by the newly wed girls who specially come to their parent's house or the village headman's house or the temple for this rite. These corn shoots are called "dhan". The girls then proceed to a stream or pond singing the some gauri songs, where they take out most of the corn bunches, and throw the basket into the water. The shoots taken out are distributed among the newly weds and small boys who sport them either on their head or ears. The height to which shoots grow are said to determine the quality of the seeds which are later to be used for sowing crops.

The last day of Sharvan, about August, is the pola day, the gala cattle festival, a day when everybody abstains from work. The celebration is in the evening when a procession of decorated bullocks is taken from outside the village to the village temple. To each horn of the animal is tied a whisk made out of the root of a tree. The animals are taken round the temple five times in a procession, while music and the playing of lezim go on. Next day, a *torun*, an arch of mango leaves, is set up at the village boundary. In the evening, the bullocks are made to march through the arch, and the local leader stations himself at the arch to welcome and bless each animal as it comes through. The owner of each animal takes it home to worship with flowers, leaves and roots, which he places at the feet of each, and the whole family makes obeisance to them. They are then fed on sweets. At this festival, the potter delivers five small earthenware bullocks. The children have a lot of fun decorating the pottery bullocks, and including them in the general ceremonies.

The Mahadev Kolis have their own way of celebrating Diwali, the Hindu festival of lights. For them, it is said to begin on the twelfth of the lunar month of Ashvin, and is connected with the cattle and their safety. The cowherds of the village prepare from the sacred grass a hooded coiled cobra with a tail, and strong enough to hold a clay lamp called Panati, with which the cowherds move from house to house waving their lights before the cattle of each household, while

the housewife gives them oil. When the round is complete, they retire to the temple to keep the lamp in a corner, and throw the grass cobra on the roof and disperse. This is repeated every evening, a fresh cobra made every day with an additional hood so that on the first day of Kartik it becomes five hooded.

On the first day of Kartik, lamps are lit all over. The local mahar takes a round of the houses, crying aloud in front of each the benediction: "May all evil depart and Bali's reign return", receiving in return a handful of grain as a blessing. It is believed that this is one day Bali is allowed to rule over the world, and is known as Balipratipada. The Kolis also observe it as Bahubij, when the sister gives her brother a silk wrist cord and half of a copra, dry coconut, while the brother gives her some coins.

In some villages, a cowdung figure of Bali is worshipped, then trampled over. Next morning, the cattle are decorated and driven over a small fire kindled in front of the house. On Lakshmi Puja day, they worship cattle and not the account books like the Hindus.

Sankrant-Kinkrant is celebrated later in January, when like the Hindus, they also have sesamum mixed with jaggery widely distributed with the same saying: "Eat sweet and talk sweet," after offering it to the deity. A significant factor in this is the role of clay pots. On this day, every potter delivers to the woman of every house five new earthen pots in which are cooked sweet round cakes called madakes. The potter gets one potful of corn for every three pots. Next day is Kinkranti when a sweet dish, dhirade, is prepared with rice-flour mixed with jaggery.

Navaratri is observed by the Mahadev Kolis in their own way in households that have the family idols. On this occasion, they become the centre for kinsmen even from other villages to gather together. The fifth day is called *phulavara*, flowering, which gets its name from the string of flowers hung over the worshipped deity. The worship is done with five small breads of rice-flour called chanak, and five small lamps also of rice dough, both made from new grain. The Durga image is installed with the waving of lights. The singing is done only to the accompaniment of hand-clapping. Bits of chanak, as also corn shoots grown specially during these days, are distributed to all.

The folk cultural troupe known as tamasha, popular in this region, performs on such occasions with cymbals and a drum. When a householder wishes to get a party to perform for him in his village, he sends his invitation with coconut and *supari*, betel-nut. If these

ingredients are accepted, it means the party has agreed to perform.

A tamasha opens with the usual invocation to Ganesh, when songs from their collection of *Ganas* (Ganapati songs) are sung. The show generally begins with a dance, after which follows a dialogue in which current social and political events are commented on. One may say that the people have their say on the prevailing conditions wittily improvised. Usually, it is like Krishna going to Mathura or Brindavan, or other topics from the epics. Then comes a short comedy followed by traditional epic stories of the tribals like that of Vaghdev. The skill of the director is to make various digressions perfectly integrated. That is what keeps it alive and touches people to the core, especially with sparkling dialogues and quick repartees. There has to be a perfect harmony between the music, dialogue and action. Another folk performance in this setting is Bodha, a speechless performance, done with masked characters. The theme is again usually from the epics.

Social Events: Birth

The Kolis have elaborate and prolonged rituals to mark a birth. When a child is born, cold water is sprinkled on it to awaken it, called opsaven. The child is not to be bathed on the fifth day but on the day of the week it was born. The fifth day, panchvi; has elaborate rites. First, the child is shifted from the mother's right side, where it has been lying, to the left. The mother's bed is also moved to another part of the room which is specially prepared with cowdung plaster. On this, the mother places two heaps of husked gram to represent the deities. The wall beside it is covered with drawings of eleven small figures, two at the head of the mother's bed, two at the foot, one on each side of the entrance, two on the side walls, three near the bath-pit and one figure with the body of lamp black and the head of red lead, together with a stalk of hemp and a brace of prickly-pear which are placed vertically near each of these figures.

The mother-in-law offers nuts, jaggery, five balls of cooked rice together with the usual offerings to the deities (grain heaps), and a part of this is also offered to the bath-pit with deep obeisance. She herself bakes the corn bread and broils wheat and gram for distribution to celebrate the birth. The midwife ties a piece of Oriss root with coloured string round the mother's neck to be worn for twelve days, and a coloured thread is also tied round the child's wrist. The child is wrapped in a new cloth presented by the maternal uncle. The

day ends with feasting. The next morning, the grain heaps are worshipped again, the child held over the incense offered to ensure against the evil eye. In some villages, a grinding stone or winnowing fan is also worshipped. The mother worships the well from which she fetches water, the ritual being known as barav puja, twelfth day worship, as it is observed twelve days after the child's birth. She draws ten vertical lines on the inner wall of the well, makes the usual markings and a deep obeisance to the well, then returns home with a pot of water.

There is a ceremony of the family god called Panchpavli, that is five steps, performed just as the child starts crawling. As it is not always feasible to take the child to the family temple, five steps are taken with the child in the direction of the temple. They may just go to the end of the village, collect five stones to do duty for the family gods to whom worship is offered, the child held again over the incense. Dry coconut is distributed to all.

Marriage

The wedding opens with gaiety, as the inviting party goes round to invite the villagers with full orchestra. When the *mandav*, pavilion, is being erected, it must have at least one pole each from the mango, the fig and the jambul. Young boys bring branches and twigs for it, and dance at the entrance, while they are welcomed by a married woman waving a lamp with wicks and offering dry coconut pieces. A large earthen pot is placed in the pavilion with its neck tied with a turmeric-dyed cloth with nuts and grain tied to one end of it. It is filled with water by five married women who are also greeted with waving of the same kind of lamp. This pot is called kara, and a maiden has to stay by it and is called karavali. The turmeric required for applying to the marriage couple has to be pounded on this day by five married women with a stone mortar and singing special songs. The contents are then transferred to an exclusive vessel tied like the water pot, with cloth and nuts knotted into one end of it. With the groom, the turmeric is applied on his turban and not his body as in the case of the bride, by his karavali who may be his sister. After this, the groom is handed a dagger with a green betel-nut or a fresh lemon stuck at its point but covered with cloth, which he has to keep throughout the ceremony. Later, the karavali places five cooked rice balls on his lap and then removes them. The same is

repeated by four married women, while special songs continue to be sung. Small balls of cooked rice are distributed to all.

At the wedding, the groom's maternal uncle presents his sister with a new sari and blouse most ceremoniously to mark her attaining "kus ujavne," which means a change in the social condition of her son. She has to don new clothes immediately, but after a bath. Each of these performances is quite formally done as rites. For instance, she is conducted by a group to the bath which helps her later to put the sari on.

There is a special worship of the family gods on this occasion when they are cleaned, decorated and taken in a procession with twigs of various fruit trees. If no such gods exist in a household, betel-nut may symbolize them. The worshipper can be a priest or householder himself, and has to have the usual offerings in a plate, while on his shoulder rests a plough and a coil of rope.

Twenty-five turmeric lines are drawn on the door in groups of five. The fruit-tree twigs are tied to the pestle and the latter in a small measure with a churning stick is, in turn, tied to the principal post of the pavilion. At this stage, the priest usually goes off into a trance and points out exactly where the mischievous spirits are lurking. When this ends, a coconut is offered by the groom and four others to Khandoba, an ancient family diety.

Another curious ceremony is clipping of two locks of the groom's hair from the two front sides as women keep singing. His sister spreads out an end of her sari to catch them, and it is said that she demands almost anything from the brother, from a hen to a piece of land for this service.

When the groom starts in the marriage procession, rice balls are waved round, some are also placed in his path which he has to crush under his feet as he walks, also knock out a dough lamp burning, all aimed at controlling the spirits. As the procession proceeds, coconut is offered to every village and stream. The procession also includes a flag called shevati, which is later hoisted over the marriage pavilion just where the two get married. If a woman with a water pot crosses them, a betel-nut and coin are put in her water pot.

There are mock scenes enacted as bye plays. Special songs are sung through these tense make-believe scenes, whose main burden is to stress the ephemeral nature of gifts. A livelier one is where the bride starts beating the groom with a piece of twisted cloth, holding him by the cloth he is wearing, while the groom holds the dagger he has been

carrying in front of his neck. The dancers too poke fun at one another through couplets which they keep hurling rapidly. Here they only dance to music, don't sing.

When the two reach their now home, they have more merriment as they rub each other with oil and turmeric, while they circumambulate and throw water over each other. They then play games. Thus, there is a lot of revelry and fun which lightens the heaviness of these prolonged ceremonies. Here is a sample. At the groom's house, five new clay pots are kept one over the other. The topmost has coconuts, the next rice, the third neck ornaments, while the fourth and fifth are empty. The bride is called on to take out the pot containing neck ornaments without making a noise. If she fumbles, she loses face and is not much thought of. There are other variations of this. In another, there are two rows of clay pots, two in each row. Those to the left contain cooked rice and pulse. Those to the right contain black beads and a dry coconut half-filled with jaggery. Here, the bride is expected to take out all the things without making a noise. She is expected to take the copra and leads herself, and serve the cooked food to the husband. A very curious custom is that the bride does not spend the first night at the husband's house, and has to go back to her parental home or elsewhere.

Death

A dying man is made to rest his head on the lap of the mother, wife, sister, or failing them, some female relative. If none is available, he reclines against a male relative sitting behind the man.

The chief mourner prepares rice in a clay pot, using only cowdung cakes for fuel. It is called Shidori, and this is tied with a coin in new clothes the corpse is dressed in to fortify him for the long journey. The latter part of the new moon day is avoided for the funeral. If a woman dies while the husband is still alive, she is dressed in a green sari, with green bangles loaded on her arms, and her lap filled with rice and other grain, a comb and a box of vermillion. If it is a man, he is fully dressed, in fact, a tailor is called in to stitch and fit the clothes. The body vest has, however, to be buttoned at the back, not the front. The head is covered by a turban, *pagote*. Thumbs and big toes are tied together by mol grass or hemp fibre. Every family member waves a lamp with a wick and a coin in front of the body, then throws the coin out of the house, which the mahar later

collects. If a pregnant woman dies, her husband can't joint the funeral.

The bier is placed on the ground at two places *en route*, one where three small stones are kept to form a triangle called "visava". In some places, a stone, mango twig and a coin are placed instead of the "visava". The stone is used at later death ceremonies called Ashma to represent the dead. They believe the spirit can go only as far as the "visava", no further. The pit is called ghar. Some bury the body in a sitting posture, some lying on the back, head facing south. For, the Kolis believe south as the *Rakshas Mohor*, direction of Ravan, which they wish to turn their back on. All present drop water from the thumb into the mouth. Then the chief mourner, usually the eldest son, stands with a water pot on his head facing the pit, while the man who started digging the grave throws a stone at it and cuts a hole. Then the chief mourner who walks round the grave three times, now stands at the opposite end of the grave, throws away the pot and returns home.

There is a little ceremony at the house of the dead after this. A circle is marked with wet cowdung outside the front door, where a woman from the bereaved family stands holding a stick vertically at the centre of the circle. She keeps on pouring water on the stick, and each mourner returning from the funeral brings some fresh grass, wets it with water, then throws it on the roof of the house. The chief mourner is the last to do this, and he too breaks the circle and flings away the stick with one sweep. Later in the evening, villagers go to the burial ground, place cowdung cakes in a ring round the grave, then set it on fire. This is called "dhuni lavane," that is, protect the grave from wild animals.

Next morning, a pilgrimage is made to the graveyard for the Savadne rite, collection of earth round the grave. Those who miss the funeral now join in this. The people sit at the grave in a circle, and shove earth on to the grave with their hands. This is Savadne. When the grave is finally arranged, bread and other offerings are placed, some at the foot, others at the head of the grave. Lastly, thorns are spread on the grave and big stones placed to weigh them down. The party carries four pieces of bread, milk, cowdung and a plateful of pipal leaves, four castor sticks and ashes, from where the *shidori* (rice for the dead) was cooked. The bread is also part of a very special ritual. Seven kinds of grain are ground into a mixture by the chief mourner, and stirred over the fire clockwise once and anti-

clockwise next, fed only by dry cowdung as fuel. It has to be baked at the same spot where the shidori was cooked previously.

When mourners return to the house, the bier carriers stand outside the house in pairs back to back, holding in each hand a piece of copra, to which ghee and cowdung are applied, and each throws the piece backwards three times over the shoulder of the partner.

The dukhavala ceremony is mainly to present the new turbans to the chief mourner and his clan brothers—only the affines do it as other relatives are in mourning. The pagote is a longish piece of cloth with short width to wrap round the head. A plate is specially kept for the presents. In place of pagote, cash may also be put in the plate. Generally, it is the barber who distributes the gifts. With the wearing of the new pagote, the mourning period is over.

Chapter Two

Tribalism in India

11 The Santhals of West Bengal and Bihar

The Santhals are regarded as amongst the earliest inhabitants of this country, and one of the three largest tribal groups. Their habitation extends from Bengal through Bihar into Orissa, roughly an area of 550 kilometers.

Origin

In the beginning, there was only water. Then god, whom they refer to as Thakur Jiu, first created aquatic animals, such as the crab, crocodile, whale, alligator, tortoise, earthworm, etc. Next, he created a pair of men, and just as he was about to breathe life into them, the horse of the sun swooped down from the sky and destroyed them. Thakur Jiu was very disappointed, so he decided to create a pair of birds instead. He moulded them out of the flesh from his own chest and breathed life into them. They were called hans and hansil. They flew around and came to settle on Thakur Jiu's hands. Just at that moment, the horse of the sun, whom the Santhals call Sin Sadom, came down to drink water. In the process, he emitted foam from his mouth which went afloat. This is said to be the origin of the foam that laces the sea water. Seeing this like a floating rafter, Thakur Jiu directed the birds to settle on them and sail the seas. But the birds were faint with hunger. So Thakur Jiu ordered the crocodile to get

soil from the bottom. But it failed, for the soil always got dissolved on the way. Every sea animal tried, but fared no better. Finally, the earthworm assured he could, if the tortoise would keep the water still. The tortoise stood with his legs chained and the earthworm gathered enough soil. On this surface, vegetation was planted. Now hans and hansil built their nest and laid two eggs. Out of them came a man and a woman who became the first ancestors of the Santhals, and are known as *Haram* and *Ayo*, which is father and mother.

Like most of the tribal lore, the Santhals too tell of the complete destruction of the human beings because of their evils ways, and how only one couple was saved to carry on the Santhal race.

Here is another enchanting legend. In the beginning, the world was a waste of water and there was no dry land. Only Thakur, the Supreme Being, and Marang Baru, the great spirit, with a council of attendant spirits reigned over this desolate watery kingdom. In course of time, Thakur thought, of instilling life in the watery waste, so he ordered Malin Budhi, one of his attendants, to prepare forms or suitable bodies into which he could breathe life. Malin Budhi brought forth two forms made out of the froth from the surface of the water. Then she took them to Thakur to put life into them. He was pleased to see the forms, ordered Malin Budhi to bring the "spirit of life" from his house. Malin Budhi was, however, short in stature and could not reach the human spirit which was placed higher up among the rafters, so she took the bird spirit instead from above the door, disobeying the strict injunction of Thakur. But he apparently did not recognize the deception, so solemnly imparted life into the two lifeless forms, and they straightaway became birds and disappeared over the water. Seeing this, the Supreme Being turned upon Malin Budhi in wrath and condemned her to become a *bhut*, an evil spirit.

These two birds, whom the Santhals call Has and Hasin, built a nest among the Sirom, and the female bird laid two eggs. From these were born the first two human beings, a boy and a girl, the progenitors of the human race. They are known among the Santhals as Pilchu Haram and Pilchu Budhi. They bore seven sons and seven daughters.

Their earliest abode is said to be Ahiri or Ahiri Pipri in Hazaribagh, where they suffered deluge and fire, ending in total destruction, except for one pair. Moreover, the Santhals are full of tales of their long and agonizing wanderings after that over many regions and tracts, until they came to settle in Santhal parganas.

The legend is recited in this verse.

In Ahiri mother I was born,
In Pipihiri mother I saw the light
In Hardata mother I grew up
In Khojakaman mother I was sought for.

Habitation

The set up of a Santhal village has more or less the same old bearings and pattern. The chief characteristic of every Santhal village is its ingrained trim appearance and neatness. Such a village is, in truth, a congregation of huts clustering together on either side of a winding tract. The mud-huts thatched with straw have their spacious courtyard surrounded by a wall or hedge to secure the privacy the Santhal loves to observe in his domestic life. The house itself has no entrance in the front save a slit in the wall, which is plastered to perfect smoothness by a mixture of cowdung and earth. Running the full length of the wall, abutting on the winding road, is a low projection, also of solid mud but coloured black, in contrast to the ochre colour of the wall. The inmates of the house sit and relax on this when the day's work is done. Usually, the house itself consists of two rooms made of hard-baked mud, save the wooden sal posts that support the roof rafters made of bamboo.

Against the wall are hung the drum and flute, the pride of Santhal men and boys. At one end of the verandah is a hollow space, enclosed by neat walls of hard-baked mud, about a foot high on which rests the tawa or kalsi. Inserted among the rafters of bamboo will be the bow and arrow—the playmate and friend of the Santhals. The brass-ware stand against the wall shining lustrously.

One corner of the courtyard is occupied by a structure like a large dog kennel where pigs and fowls herd at night. The back of the house has an enclosure in continuation of the courtyard for large sheds, trimly made of sal-wood saplings providing shelter to cows and goats. The bean creepers grow around the sal posts in their rampant luxuriance with their purple and white flowers.

Walking down the winding village path, one will notice an infinite variety of houses, each with its own individuality, designed artistically, with longitudinal or horizontal projections out of the wall surrounding the courtyard. These projections conform to the curvature of the pattern. A Santhal village is more meaningful than its mere material facade. It is the exciting life with which it pulsates within that marks

out its significance. Each season, each vocational operation, each social event is made into an occasion for a ceremonial, with its own round of joy and festivity. The Manjhithan at the centre of the village street is the place where the Santhals offer their prayers. It is a raised mud square platform with wooden posts at the corners, supporting the thatched shed. The elders of the village sit at its base to decide issues of importance or to pass judgement on anyone who has broken the tribal law.

Religion and Deities

In every village, the banyan, the pipul, the tamarind and the neem trees which have weathered the storm are respected and worshipped by the Santhals for their antiquity.

We already know of Thakur Jiu who is also identified with Dhorom or Sing Bonga, the sun god, worshipped only once every decade by the Santhals. The chief presiding deity is Maran Buru: *Maran* means great, *Buru* is hill, so he is "great hill." He is both powerful and kind as well as mischievous. A curious deity is Montenko Turuiko which, literally means five to six in number, but is really a single deity addressed in the plural. The legend goes that there were five brothers married to six sisters who presided over the welfare of the village ranging from children to crops, and were symbolized by stones. However, for festivals huts were erected for worship.

The Santhals fill their hills with spirits called Pats. The chief hill spirit is Berha Pat, worshipped for protection during hunting, and for journeys, Devi Pauri Pat. Chandra Pat is for rain and Dagarsila during warfare. There is Sula Pat whose blessings are specially sought for success in litigation.

While they worship ancestors on special occasions, they also propitiate them at other festivals. There are other spirits, male and female, essentially mischievous, to whom special offerings have to be made to please them, gifts consisting of grass hoppers, frogs, worms, burnt clay from ovens, sun dried rice, etc. Clay images are made to represent these spirits and are invoked either in the house or at the crossroads. Special mention has to be made of Acraeli Bonga or Jodhe Bonga who presides over the interests of married women.

There is the family household deity, Orak Bonga and Abge Bonga, the secret god. No Santhal will ever disclose the names of these deities to anyone, except the eldest son who is said to guard this even from

their wives, lest these spirits possess them and turn them into witches. Orak Bonga is invoked for the welfare of the household during the winter harvest, flower festival and sowing rites. The Abge Bonga has to be worshipped near ant-hills.

Bongas seem to exist everywhere and get deeply involved in the affairs of human beings. The situation gets quite complicated when they choose to assume human shape and establish intimate relationship with mankind. Their abode and way of life are graphically described, and make an exciting description. Their seats are formed by coiled up serpents, and by their side are leopards, tigers, bears, deers, and such animals who serve them: tigers as dogs, deer as oxen, bears as household servers. It is believed that even though these beasts live in jungles, they are under the control of the Bongas.

Society and Social Ceremonies

The concept and operation of kinship is a very strong factor in their life. Each clan is divided into two groups, one, members of the same blood between whom there can be no marriage; the other, Bondhu Pera, with whom they can contract marriage. These clan ties among the Santhals are said to be very strong and real, and transcend ordinary relationships. Further, each kinship carries with it certain rights and duties governed by rules of mutual behaviour. For instance, cleansing from defilement after childbirth is done by kinsmen by rubbing themselves with oil. The offering of oil can only be done by the father of the child, none else. The maternal uncle is very important, particularly in the marriage ceremony, when he gets a present called mamapon, which is really a part of the bride price when there is no father. The son-in-law has an important function too during his sister-in-law's marriage. He also holds the Bahu Daura, a large-sized basket in which a bride is raised shoulder-high at the wedding ceremony to enable the groom to apply *sindhur*, vermilion powder, on the forehead.

The Santhals also pledge perpetual kinship between two young girls through a ceremonial. This is sealed in a most fascinating manner by giving each other clothes, presents and, most important of all, bestowing each other with alluring names. Girls usually choose names of flowers and leaves. The link is consummated in an equally beautiful gesture, putting flowers into each other's hair. Thereafter, they address each other only by the flower name. An equally unusual tie is

knit between mothers having equal number of children, also through a ceremonial called Saika, when there is an exchange of gifts and feasting.

ADMINISTRATION

The Santhals have quite an elaborate administrative and judicial system. The main authority in a village rests with the headman who deals with cases, socio-religious, legal, quasi-legal, in consultation with the panchayat called monren hor. They also deal with cases in respect of violation of religious taboos.

The rural units which may comprise about twenty villages are federated under the supervision of an official called Desh-Pradhan. He presides over an inter-village council consisting of village elders representing the villages under him. This becomes a court of appeal. When a particular case is being tried, the headman of the village refers the case on appeal. Above all these federated units is a chief called Pargana with a definite area under his rule.

There is another court termed the supreme court. It assembles at the end of a ceremonial hunt. The court sits to try only grave offences. Notice of this is given through a knot tied to a rope or a branch of a sal tree, and sent round from market to market. The penalties are imposed in different forms: breach of a marriage taboo is a serious offence. If the party is found guilty, the headman who complains gets the credit, but if the party is acquitted, the headman himself is punished. When a party is declared guilty, a decree of excommunication is passed, and this is given effect in a demonstrative manner called Bitlaha. This is announced through a branch of a sal tree that a Santhal carries from village to village. A bamboo pole is fixed in front of the offender's house attached with a used leaf plate as a sign of his being disgraced. Big crowds assemble on the appointed day, sing ng vulgar songs, dancing with war-drums, brandishing broomsticks and half burnt logs. The ostracized are strictly isolated. Sometimes, a whole village may be condemned, and that certainly causes great misery.

The guilty must correct himself or herself, pay fine and perform penance, besides paying for the cost of the ceremony. In some places, an imposing sal-wood structure is erected in which effigies of straw or mud of the offenders are placed, while their clothes are hung outside. Then amidst a lot of noise and drumming, the penance ceremony

is conducted. Another penance ceremony is performed at the village crossroads where crowds assemble, and the offender stands in deep humility and sorrow. He carries water in a pitcher with five holes, and a propitiatory ceremony is performed invoking Dhorom and Maran Buru. The fine paid is divided amongst the village elders, and the clothes of the offenders are taken round the market place. Those assembled rinse their mouth with water from the pitcher as a mark of cleansing, and finally drink rice-beer. The pitcher as well as clothes are then thrown into the river at the bathing-ghat. The outcasts are eligible also for readmission. The offender washes the feet of the village elders, and personally serves them food. Then they address the repenter. Even if it is a divorce, the whole village seems affected by the offence of the couple. They dig a hole and bury cowdung or just deposit it at the place where the ceremony was performed, and offer sacrifices. Any act which smacks of disturbing or violating tribal solidarity is treated as an impurity subjected to severe penalty and vigorous purification, for tribal unity is uppermost in their minds.

Ceremonies

One of the earliest ceremonies a young boy goes through is Caco-Chatiar which marks his admission into the community life. No one can go through a marriage ceremony without having performed this. Nor would he be entitled to a proper funeral or other death ceremonies. The ceremony is as follows: Women rub oil and turmeric on the bodies of all the village men. Rice-beer is drunk to the accompaniment of singing and dancing. Later, an old man recites all the tribal lore. Thus, the young man is declared free of all impurities, and when he is initiated into drinking beer, he becomes entitled to full rights and responsibilities. It ends with the following invocation to the Monren Hor: "We were black like crows, now we are white as white paddy birds, you five men are our witnesses."

Children have marks of cicatrization on their wrists, one, three, five or nine, made by a burnt rag called sika, which ensures the child's "life," that is, protection from harm. However, women don't have them. The tattoo marks are on the wrists. The sun sign is the most favoured, probably because of its association with Sing Bongo, the sun god. The women consider tattoo as an identification mark to be shown to god. With women, tattoo marks have the same significance as the sika mark, a religious compulsion.

The Santhals seem to have freedom and voice in the fixing up of marriages. What is intriguing, however, is that the Santhals have a wide range of marriages. If the bride or bridegroom had the first tooth in the upper gum, they have to be married to a tree first to avoid the evil effects of this inauspicious sign. One curious custom in the marriage is that when the bridegroom's party approaches the bride's house, its entry is barred till it answers some riddles. Here is one of these riddles. There are sixty buffaloes and fifteen posts. Can you tie them in odd numbers? The answer is to repeat the question with emphasis on the word "be jor" to convey that you can tie them by force. There are several such amusing posers before the party gains entry. The bride enters the marriage place sitting on a basket held high up by the groom's elder brother, while the groom is carried on the shoulder of his brother-in-law. The couple stand with the groom facing the east and the bride facing the west, and throw rice and sprinkle water over each other with mango leaves. Though the whole wedding is a continuous elaboration of several rites, the main rite is the simplest of all. The groom applies vermilion on bride's forehead to shouts of "haribol" from the assembled. This is traced to the days when this mark was made by mixing together the blood of the two, and applying it to the forehead of each other. Then this song is sung:

The vermilion in the name of Hari is pure and true,
The vermilion in the name of the flower is pure and true.
The vermilion in the name of Hari is wafted on me.
In the name of Hari, he (husband) tweaks a flower,
My life and clan are now complete.

The couple then have to eat together, as this also constitutes an essential rite. Later, the bride offers rice-beer to the groom's party who, in return, presents her with gifts.

The couple have to make offerings with vermilion to the god of water, Ma Gonga, with the tips of their fingers. Whoever is the first to make the mark on the water becomes the ruling party.

The Santhals also have a very simple form in the case of a love marriage, where the vermilion applying is done in the house of the village headman, while all other formalities are avoided. It is known as Raja Raji. There is also the runaway marriage which is regularized by the same vermilion ceremony. There is another version of it where the couple go into the jungle to garland each other, then come

back to the village as husband and wife. It is known as "Baha Dor Bapla." "Kiring Janwane" is a marriage of convenience where a woman is with a child, perhaps of a liaison with someone who is in the taboo relationship. Some man volunteers to marry her for some consideration. "Hurkatara" or "Itut" marriage is by means of capture, when a man set on acquiring a certain young lady encounters difficulties or resistance, takes the desperate step of claiming her publicly, quite unconcerned about her reaction. The claim is established when the rubs vermilion on her forehead before a crowd, and physically carries her off. This is a recognized form of marriage, and if the girl refuses to live with him, there is a divorce. There is a reverse of this called "Nir Bolok" when a widow can go to live with a man of her choice. There is no bride price. So is the case when a young man pledges himself to work in the house of his prospective father-in-law for a period of three to five years to win his bride, sometimes even permanently where the man has no sons of his own. Initially, he toils to cover the bride price, after which it is optional for him to stay or leave when he has won the girl of his choice. When he chooses to stay it is called "Gharde' Janwane".

Dances

The Santhals are greatly noted for their songs and dances. What is of interest are their longish songs like long-playing records for important festivals and marriages.

The Santhal word for dance is *enee*, same as for children's play, for dance is a play for them. They have the most fabulous dances. Most of the dances are done by men and women together. But there are exclusive dances by men and women separately. "Lagren" is the most popular, and can be performed at any time. A moonlight setting is preferred. Its formation is like a complete circle. They dance waving their feet forward making an angle, then swing to the right as the circle keeps moving anti-clockwise. In this, the couples face sideways, and talk while dancing. This, it is said, encourages love-making and courtship.

Mostly love songs are sung:

On the banks of the river whose lute plays?
Alas, the heart weeps.
I haven't seen with eyes nor heard with ears.

Alas, my heart weeps.

Some Lagren songs are also invocations to the rain god.
Here is a typical one:

In the sky clouds rumble, O god! On the earth dust flies.
O god the ears of corn dry up, the hearts of men are breaking,
O god.

The "Don" dance seems to be performed on joyous occasions such as marriage, or when a farmer gives a thanksgiving party after his agricultural operations have been successfully concluded with the help of friends and volunteers from the neighbourhood. Women interlock their arms and advance two steps sideways to the right, extending each foot forward then backward with the rhythm. The men are in the centre with flutes and drum to provide accompaniment. All women sing together, the song indicating the purpose of the dance. Once the dance finishes, there is a change and men take over the singing, while women reply in chorus. The suggestive hip movement characteristic of these dances is interpreted as the sex emotion.

"Jatur" is the dance of the harvest festival. Men dance separately in a circle taking two steps forward, bending their knees and gracefully raising their folded hands, then turning two steps backward and swinging their hands up and down. There is also a purely devotional dance when dancers go on saluting the gods of the holy grove in gratitude for the good harvest they have given them. In this, the dancers from two lines, the older ones in front singing and dancing with arms joined Right behind is the line of younger ones, some of them beating the *sarpas*, small brass cymbals, while two women at the end of the line wave the ends of their saris to fan the others. The Santhals promise a "Jatur" dance to the deity when some calamity is apprehended.

The "Rinja" is mostly a dance of the youth. Young men and women form separate circles, while the musicians play in the centre. Here, each dances separately to the music in eight special movements with one hand raised making circular gestures, while the other hand swings naturally. This is done mainly at Karam Puja. Some postures are taken as magical suggestions, while others are imitations of daily chores at home or in the field, or clearing jungles or milching cows and the like. The swinging of the hand up and down is associated

with invocation to rain, done when drought is apprehended. Here is a poetical supplication on such an occasion.

"In the sky clouds rumble Oh god! On earth dust flies. O god! The ears of corn dry up, the hearts of men are breaking."

"Danta" is a special dance of the youth who form two circles putting the musicians in the centre. It is performed by stepping twice to the right and then to the left, as the dancers move forward. Then suddenly, the circle swings backwards in a swift but highly artistic way. Women don't join in this, maybe because of skipping jumps. An interesting feature is the way the dancers in the two rows change places, clasping hands with great affection while meeting halfway, and embraceing each other like lovers.

The "Dahar" dance is usually done from late January to February-March. Here, men and women together form a circle with arms entwined. The circle moves taking two steps forward, then changing the direction to the left with a step, and next to the right again with a single step. Thus: the circle seems to keep moving all the time. This is a religious dance and a sort of a prelude to the coming Baha, flower festival. The songs are all devotional, addressed to the deity of the holy grove, Jaherera.

The "Baha" dance is also purely devotional, and performed when men and women go to the holy grove with the village priest to invoke the deity. But only women dance. It is a most picturesque dance. Each dancer seems to go lightly touching the ground, men singing and women replying. The dancers wave their right hand up to the shoulders, then swing down and gracefully fold. When the right hand is raised, the right foot takes a step, then the left comes forward and the folded hands are raised with a devotional tremor. Thus they move towards the grove and dance thrice round it. It is also danced when the village priest returns home with the flowers on the final day of the feast.

There is a wild hunter's dance performed by men on the annual hunt night. It largely involves leaping into the air and enacting hunting scenes.

Musical Instruments

Santhal musical instruments are decorated with carved dynamic

human figures. The total height is about thirty inches. On the Mal Pahaira Sarang are two dancers, one has his hand above his head, a common gesture among tribals. The design is elaborate and vigorous, the head and the legs of each bristle with a fringe of tiny triangles, and though the face is entirely blank, body, arms and legs are carefully etched.

Sarpa, a percussion instrument, is only used at the harvest dance by women. It consists of a vertical pole about fifteen inches high, fixed into two crossed horizontal pieces of wood. Holes are bored in the foot-long horizontal pieces, and through these holes pass lengths of string, to the end of which are attached small circular wooden clappers. With the handle at the top of the vertical pile in the left hand and the upper end of the string held in the right hand, the clappers can be drawn sharply against the wooden bars, thereby producing a ringing sound. While some Sarpas are plain, others have the handle carved as a dove with geometrical designs on the horizontal bars.

The Buan is a musical instrument associated with Dussera festivities. The arc of the bow, a large hollow gourd, is attached to add resonance to the sound of the plucked bow strings. The gourd is decorated with paper streamers. One of the touching songs sung by the Santhals is in honour of the instrument itself, and recounts movingly the birth and growth of the gourd on the manure heap!

A popular instrument is the flute with six holes beautifully made. At the top end, there is a brass figure of Krishna, and at the other is mounted a brass dove. Another is T-shaped, the air being blown into the base of the T, while the arms which are longer than the base, contain the finger holes.

Banam is the one string fiddle, about eighteen inches long, in which the bowls are hollowed out from a piece of wood or formed sometimes from half a coconut usually covered with lizard or monkey skin, and the string is made from the goat's intestines. The bowl is pressed against the players' armpit and the bow is drawn across the string with the right hand, while the fingers of the left hand depress the string at the required point. It is a difficult instrument and is mainly used to accompany men's songs with rather a monotonous kind of "seconds."

The drums are the most conspicuous of the Santhal musical instruments. The two commonly used and played together are Tumdak and Tamak, both for their size and volume. They are played upon by young men who leap in front of the line of dancing women. The

Tumdak is made of burnt clay, conical in shape. The narrow end is covered by goat's skin and the wide end by bullock hide, the end coverings being kept in place by narrow leather strips running the length of the drum, with other strips wound round the drum. It is suspended by thongs from the shoulders of the player who beats out the main rhythm with his right hand on the narrow end, while the left hand beats a deeper note on the broad end to punctuate the bars.

The Tamak is a kettle drum made of iron in the shape of a bowl and covered with bullock hide. In addition to being used as an accompaniment for the Tumdak, it is also the hunting drum slung from the shoulders of the player, and beaten with a pair of sticks. A variant of the Tamak is the Lerda which has a flat bottom. The Dhak is a large and long drum hollowed out of wood popularly in use at weddings and dance gatherings. It has to be carried by two men slung from a bamboo pole which they keep on their shoulders. Its reverberations can be heard even at a great distance.

The Santhals are a musical people. From an early age, boys start playing tunes on a whistle in plaintive notes as they tend the herds. They are also poetic people as their songs prove. Here are some.

The birds of the forest are crying,
They cry with different songs, love.
The fish cry softly, love,
My soul cries for you.

Song sung at a men's dance:

The life of man is like a jhinga flower.
For what did you come into the world?
What will you receive but misfortune?
At the end Krishna will have you.

Marriage song:

O go-between, how big is the bride?
Answer: Neither big nor little;
Like a broom with bells in the handle,
She is firm when used for sweeping.

O go-between, how big the bridegroom?

Answer: Neither big nor little;
He herds the cows on the banks where the kasi grass grows,
Playing sweetly on his flute.

Here is a sweet and simple duet between husband and wife:

Wife: You are whistling while going,
Key flowers, champa flowers, bring for me, O my love.
Husband: I will bring, O my love, and put them in your hand,
But how will you use them? How will you wear them?
Wife: O love I am wise enough, I am clever enough.
I will string them in the plait of my hair, I will entwine them in the knob of my hair.

Festivals

The Santhals have enriched almost their entire year by filling it up with the gaiety of festivals. The first starts with the sowing of paddy seeds. Erok Sima is celebrated at the holy grove when a number of deities are worshipped followed by a feast celebrated for three days. Then there is a special offering to the boundary deity.

In early summer, in Baisakh and in early monsoon, come the Erok Sima and Hariar Simko festivals, also called the feast of the sprouting rice, for it is seed time. The village deities alone are worshipped to solicit a rich crop.
They sow seeds to songs like this:

Lakshmi! O Lakshmi who are thy father and mother?
My parents are the breeze and the rains O!
Lakshmi, where were thou born?
I was born in the dust and mud O!
My birth took place when the rains came O!
The paddy crop has only now come out,
This time the fields are green with the shoots of the young corn,
At long last the young paddy has come to life
And spreads itself over the fields in a mantle of green.

This is followed immediately by the Iri Gundli, the millet festival, that consists of offering of the first crop of millet to the tribal gods. The priest cuts the standing crop, carries it to the grove where he spills

some milk and prays to all gods of the grove. It is called muchri.

The Janthar festival is a community one, and is in honour of the tribal deity, Janthar. The unusual feature of this is that all the articles of worship are supplied by the priest himself, and only men eat the sacrificial meat. It is, in fact, the offerings of the first fruit of low-land paddy. It is found to be observed only where this moist land rice is grown.

It is a two-day festival. A lot of taboo is observed. The hut in the grove is repaired and cleaned by only unmarried boys keeping a fast. The five related deities are invoked by suitable songs and dances. Five men rub a plantain with sun-dried rice which is supposed to get a sure response from the gods. Next day, the villagers proceed to the grove singing and dancing.

The most celebrated is the winter harvest festival called Sohrae, held on a full moon night in mid-winter. Even the declaration of the festival is made in a ceremonial fashion earlier at the Manjhithan by the *Manjhi*, the headman, and *Jog Manjhi*, the man who arranges these festivals, etc., with the following words: "Now let us put earth upon our eyes, so that each may not see what the other does, and let us put cotton in our ears, so that none may hear what his neighbour says, until the time Sohrae has passed."

This is expected to augur well for the festival. It starts with a cleansing ceremonial. At the grove, an extraordinary scene takes place. The village elders ask the Santhal cowboys to drive their cows across the enclosure with sticks anointed with vermilion, where an egg has been placed on a pile of rice at a particular spot. If the cowboy succeeds in making his cow break the egg, it is deemed lucky and is cheered. He is carried shoulder-high, and his cow's feet ceremoniously washed and horns anointed. The high tempo of the festival is reached the night of the "waking the cattle," when young men keep vigil, and go round softly to wake the cows up by playing pipes and drums.

The village maidens deck themselves with flowers, and go singing to the headman's house where, with fresh paddy grass and clay lamps, they sing special songs and visit all the cowsheds. The crowd moves to the *akhara*, open playground, for the dance to the call of the flute and the burst of the drum. It is a beautiful and picturesque sight. The dancers lead the way dancing in a most exotic manner, the whole crowd swaying and singing the song of Sohrae in a simple but rhythmical way, the pipers adding their wild plaintive music, followed

by the reverberating monotonous beating of the drum.

The dance begins in right earnest as the crowd reaches the akhara. The girls form themselves in a huge semi-circle round the drummers, with hand in hand, retreating and advancing in rhythmical steps, keeping time with a wonderful precision, For hours the dance goes on without any visible slowness in spirit or energy.

The dawn breaks with an excited interest. The chilly wind and mist over the low-lying fields send a shiver down the body. The day starts with the worship of the cow, followed by a ceremony which foretells your luck. The religious ceremony of the Sohrae is performed usually with the sacrifice of a goat to Marang Baru.

Next day is the "blessing the cattle," when posts are fixed all over the place, and cows and buffaloes lavishly decorated are tied to them. They are fed on delicacies, and blessings pronounced as young men keep dancing round them. Then all assemble in the headman's house and play games.

A day later is the ceremonial hunt. They must, at least, catch a fish or crab. On the final day, everyone goes visiting and exchanging greetings. The last item is sports, the most exciting being the shooting at targets, bamboo staff play, etc.

Festivals

An important festival is the Bahi Parab (*Bahi* is flower, *Parab* is festival). It is held after the full moon in March to celebrate the advent of spring, and the splendid bloom of flowers. The sal trees are now resplendent with blossoms and tender leaves. Each village holds it on a different day so that the inhabitants of each village can join the festivities of other villages. This festival, unlike some others, puts the stress on purity. The opening day is observed as the bathing day. The scene is laid in the sacred grove around which centres Santhal worship. The two tallest trees standing beside are recognized as abodes of Mariant Buru, the main spirit of the Santhals, and his consort Jaher Era, lady of the grove. Others like Gosene Era, Honreka, Marian Baru are known as the "fives." The priest then collects the following articles as insignia for the deities, like a bow and arrow, a pick axe, a basket and broom, and a gong which are anointed.

Now three men become possessed, one impersonates Monrenka and takes up the bow and arrow, second Jaher Era takes the basket and sweeps the shrine, while Marian Baru picks up the axe. When

the three return from the grove, the priest takes back the insignia from them, propitiates them with rice and chants incantations, after which the three indicate the trend of events for the future. Then follow the special Baha songs and dances. Here are a few samples:

On the pipal tree, the woodpecker is twittering,
Under the banyan tree, the gutrut is singing. Has the spring arrived?
Chorus answers: The seasons have changed so the woodpecker twitters;
The spring has come back, so the gutrut babbles. The spring has come back to us.

High up in the pipal tree
Sings the crimson-breasted barbet.
It wanders through the country, it flies over the land.

Down in the valley blooms the hat-tree sister,
Come let us make flower chains sister
Come let us wear the flowers dangling.

The second day is the shooting at sal flowers, a very picturesque performance. Rice, salt and turmeric are gathered from the villagers, and all go singing to the sacred grove. Once again, the spirit-inspired men don their insignia and run to the grove. Here Monrenko shoots at the budding sal flowers with the arrow. Marian Baru climbs the tree and cuts the flowering branches, and Jaher Era puts them away in the basket. Other flowers are also gathered while returning. Now the actor-deities, if one may term them so, are enshrined in their respective huts, and the priest receives them humbly with a cloth round his neck as a mark of the villagers' surrender to them. Once again there are songs and dances.

The third day marks the return home. As the priest marches back from the grove with sal flowers, which a young man carries in a basket, he stops at each house where the maidens wash his feet and honour him and, in turn, he offers them sal flowers.

There follows a water festival when people throw water (not coloured) on one another. It is a free for all, except where custom forbids such familiarity because of certain relationship. No Santhal, for instance, will do it to his wife's elder sister, or his younger brother's wife. It ends like all other festivals with song and dance.

Chapter Two

Tribalism in India

12 The Chenchus of Andhra Pradesh

Origin

The Chenchus of Andhra live mostly in the Amrabad plateau, which is the northern most part of the Nallamalai hills. The higher ranges comprising the forest region are inhabited almost exclusively by the Chenchus. But gradually many have been moving down the edge, taken to cultivation or settled in villages as agricultural labour. The Chenchus do not have any story of creation as such, but they tell the following story of how the Chenchus came into existence.

A couple of the Ravel clan lived in the forest. Tragically enough, every child the couple bore was immediately carried away by a tiger from the forest. Finally, in despair, they decided to move away to another part. But while one could walk, the other could not as the woman was already in labour, and had to be left behind. She lay under a jilledu tree and the tiger sat near-by waiting for the child to arrive. The petrified woman in labour prayed to Garelamai-sama, the deity who controls the forest and wild animals. The moment a boy was born, the mother ran away leaving the child under the tree. Garelamai-sama moved by this, came in the guise of an old woman and took care of the boy, protecting him from the tiger and feeding him on the milky juice of the tree. When he grew up into a sturdy youth, he sought out the tiger who had threatened him, and killed it,

saving its claws and tail. Then he wandered in search of his parents. At last, he came upon the two Ravel couples, one of whom realized he was their son. But the boy was convinced only when the branches of the jilledu tree, under which he was sitting, broke and the juice flowed into his mouth, and simultaneously, milk spurted from the breast of his mother into his mouth. The happy parents wished to get him a bride, but he insisted he would only marry a girl who was born like him under a jilledu tree.

About this time, another Ravel woman was in labour under a jilledu tree, but she died as soon as she delivered a girl. Once more Garelamai-sama came to rescue the child. The youth in search of a bride met her and knew her as his mate. Soon they were married, and Garelamai sama provided them with all their needs. These were the first Chenchus who gave rise to the whole tribe.

The Chenchus say their women were once very beautiful but are not any longer. They tell a little tale to explain this tragedy. Narasinha, an avatar of Vishnu, fell in love with a Chenchu girl, Chenchita, and took her as his wife to live in his abode. But as the first wife was contemptuous of her, Chenchita became very unhappy and prayed that in future no Chenchu girls be good looking, lest they get abducted like her.

Religion and Deities

The Chenchus are generally accepted as pre-Dravidian who lost their original language. Therefore, a search for their indigenous tribal deities often leads to confusion, as they are either mixed up or confused with the Hindu ones. There is Garelamai-sama, the deity of the jungle, and is prayed before and after a hunt. In fact, a piece of the kill is offered on the spot where the animal is killed. The Chenchus are supposed to kill only male animals, lest it angers the female deity, though it is also addressed sometimes as father. As far as one can judge, Chenchu prayers do not conform to any strict fromula, they are mostly spontaneous outpourings.

The altar to Garelamai-sama consists of three or four upright and flat stones, sometimes arranged in a semi-circle. The deity rules over many things connected with jungle life, even the blossoming of flowers and burgeoning of fruits. Therefore, the first produce is offered to her with a simple prayer. She is also called upon to watch when they climb up trees to gather fruit. One noteworthy fact is that no roots

or herbs are included in the offerings. When the first Mohua liquor of the year is ready, a little is poured over the stones. On this occasion, she is asked to protect them from intoxication and drunken behaviour. All these rites and prayers show she governs even the behaviour of men, which gives a much wider dimension to her rule and powers.

The other popular god is Bhagvantaru. This deity is, however, not to be mixed up with the Hindu bhagwan, god. They seek his protection when they start out on their rounds to see them safely back home. He is the god of the sky, thunder and rain, and dwells in the sky. They also believe that the soul or life of each individual comes from him, and returns to him on his death. But if a man has been doing evil deeds, Bhagvantaru may refuse to take him back, and this turns the man into an evil ghost. Both these gods are beneficient, also accessible. No offerings are made or rites performed for Bhagvantaru.

Lingamaya is also an important god of the chase.

Now we come to those who are more dreaded than loved like Potsamma, the small-pox goddess, also known as Ammavaru. She too has stones sacred to her.

There are village deities too, like Guruvappa and Guruvamma, considered benevolent and propitiated in all crises. There is Lachamma who is made an offering before planting millet and corn.

The Chenchus believe that some of the local deities follow their devotees if they move to a different place. Gangamma is the water deity; while crossing water they offer a prayer to her. They give an offering to Gangamma when child's hair is first cut. And they rarely have community worship, mostly individual. Curiously enough, women do not participate in any of these ceremonials.

Habitation

As compared with their former nomadic habits, the Chenchus have comparatively more settled habitation. They are still subject to migrations part of the year, partly for food-gathering in forests, partly in search of water. Even those more permanently settled may move away or shift only when they wish to rebuild their houses. A noteworthy fact is the preference they show for stretches of naked rock for living. It is presumed that though this involves considerable labour to build the floor, they see the advantage of water draining out quickly.

The permanent house is built solidly with a circular wattle wall

and a conical thatched roof. The builder first marks the centre and with the help of a string a circle is described. It is important for the entrance to face the rising sun. Twilling technique is used for weaving the wattle walls, while the green side forms the outer side so that the rain may easily slide off. Each length of the bamboo weft is started at a different point, the weft being bent round the door stakes and re-used to form the next row. The centre post has to have a natural fork at the top to take the rafters for the roof. When building on rock, the pole is propped up by stones to keep it erect. The door too is of wattle.

Their temporary dwellings are simple enough to be constructed in a couple of hours. They are shelters constructed out of leafy branches, rectangular in shape, with posts to support the flat roof and vertical walls. Others are set up against tree trunks, and enclose a ground space roughly triangular.

Society and Social Events

Chenchus are not only sturdy, they are also agile. Their honey-gathering from combs clinging to rocks is a most thrilling act to watch. A long bark rope is used, one end of which is secured to a sturdy tree at the top, while the other is dropped down with a twigged bamboo at the end. A trusted relative or friend watches at the rope at the tree end. The honey-seeker climbs down the rope and stands on the twigged bamboo, firmly lashed to it to release his arms. Simultaneously, a long cord is dropped from the top attached to a barbed bamboo spike which he snatches into his hand. Now he begins to swing his own rope until he can get near enough to be able to thrust the spiked bamboo deep into the honeycomb after which he lets go, cord the attached to the bamboo. He then starts cutting the comb away from the rock with a sword until it is broken away from the rock. It is immediately hauled up by the cord to the hilltop.

Honey from combs in inaccessible places is procured by shooting an arrow with a number of threads attached. The honey gatherer will sit below it and collect the honey as it trickles down the strings. Sometimes, a fresh fibre is used instead. There seems a regular war of wits between the Chenchus and the bees, the former invariably getting the better of it.

At times, the honey gatherer carries a palm-leaf torch and a basket along with a knife. Here he chases away the bees, cuts the comb off

the rock and gathers it into his basket. In fact, there is a special basket woven for honey collection.

They are said to be almost uncannily swift on their feet, and yet, perfectly noiseless. In fact, under the old Vijayanagar rule, they used to be engaged specially for spying and tracking down the undesirables. They are also adept at camouflaging, by crouching they make themselves look like stunted bushes.

Marriage

The Chenchu marriage is very simple. It consists of the bridegroom giving a sari and a blouse to the bride, and only a blouse to the bride's mother. The couple then sits down together on a mat, and the ends of their apparel tied into a knot when everyone blesses them. This informality shows that not much store is laid by elaborate ceremonies, what matters is that the two who wish to live together in conjugal partnership, do so. Similarly, after childbirth the Chenchus don't have strict taboos about impurity. Nor do they have a series of rites, not even for naming the child.

There are no rites performed when a man is about to die. As the saying goes: "He is allowed to die in peace." Food is kept on the grave for three days, so placed as to rest over the head, the stomach and the feet. For, the conviction is that god gives life and then takes it away. On the tenth day only there is a ceremonial. The food in leaf-bundles is carried in a procession to the graveyard or cremation ground. The son of the deceased gets his head fully shaved, submerged into a pool or stream with the leaf-bundle. His endeavour is to see that neither the leaves nor rice rises to the surface, but settles down at the bottom. After this, everyone has a bath, goes home and eats. Only close relatives and friends take part, not the village or community as elsewhere.

Craftsmanship

Though the Chenchus do not show any elaborate workmanship, their aesthetic sense is seen in the ornamentation of spoons, bowls, wooden dishes for serving with simple carvings. Their bamboo measures are decorated on the outer surface by incised engraving or cut in relief patterns. Sometimes, it has a border of geometrical designs at the rim and at the bottom. A zigzag or a triangular band circles the middle

also, the intermittent fields being left free. Another pattern that is seen in this style consists of oblique cross hatching alternating with double parallel bands internally decorated with incised slits. Normally, line designs are executed with the sharp point of a knife. But a more satisfying technique is engraving with a tiny twisting iron spike known as Vanna, copied from nature. The latter style is termed naturalistic or conventional, while the former designs are drawn from the carver's imagination. The two may sometimes appear on the same object.

The combs are usually decorated in bands of geometrical designs carved in raised relief, usually zigzags or triangles. Some of the musical instruments are also ornamented. All this amply proves that the Chenchus crave for embellishment. Even in weaving the wattle for the wall or leaves for the thatch, they try to alternate black with light yellow or arrange green and white sides of the weft in equal bands.

The Chenchus are equally deft and nimble in weaving their baskets, of which there is quite a variety. The coarser ones are for rough use and the finer for personal use, each being shaped according to the purpose it is indended for, from closed-in ones for keeping grain to shallow and open ones for drying fruit; straight-sided circular baskets for collecting jungle produce, V-sided for collecting fruits and mohua flowers; round-sided for keeping clothes and small ones with strings attached to be hung up as cases for keeping ornaments and other prized articles. The finely woven ones used as jewellery and trinket cases are greatly treasured, and even worn on the hip for a dance called the honey-basket. In weaving, they use the rather rigid broad plait warp on which they weave lengths of triangularly spliced bamboo weft. The weave is either twilled or checked, lattice twining being used to reinforce both the rim and the base. In the covered basket, the latticed turning is used for ornamentation.

Musical Instruments

The Chenchus have a number of instruments. One may start with the drum which seems ancient. It is a single membrane one called Dapardi used in all dances. It is stretched over a hoop of tamarind wood already thickly smeared with tamarind juice. It is heated over the fire to raise it to the right pitch. The main function of the drum is to measure the rhythm for the dance. In fact, the introduction that

presses the dancers into action is a simple rhythm with one tap from each drumstick. It changes over to one with trioles, for the dance itself is produced by successive taps from the two sticks.

The flute is made of thin bamboo, played vertically and usually decorated with incised designs. The pan-pipe, Nagaserum, is an interesting wind-instrument made of two river reeds and a small gourd. The engravings can be found on this too in Vanna technique showing even hunting scenes.

The Kineri, patterned like a guitar, is however, the most complicated. It is made of bamboo as base, two metal strings stretched over nine bone bridges adjusted by two pegs, one high and the other low, situated at the upper end of the bamboo stem. Three gourds attached to the bamboo base serve as resonators, different notes being produced with a finger, the strings being plucked by the right-hand fingers. It is usually decorated with a tuft of peacock feathers stuck into the upper end of the bamboo stem.

The Chenchus have a short story of how they adopted the drum. In the days before the drum was known, a man went hunting to a jungle and saw two monkeys dancing happily, the male playing a drum. The hunter took aim, but instead of killing the male, he shot the female. After the male monkey buried her, he left the drum on her grave. The hunter picked it up and carried the drum to his village where people enjoyed drumming it. So, according to the Chenchus, man acquired the drum from the monkey.

Dances

Unlike most tribals, dance has no religious significance for the Chenchus. To them, it is purely a social recreation. Nevertheless, they show a genius for dramatization and a great gaiety of spirit while dancing. When women dance by themselves, theirs is mostly the conventional one, and based on a sequence of formations executed with springs and lilting steps, bending the body forward and upward, holding the tip of the sari in one hand and swinging it in rhythm to the beat of the drum. They move in circles, couples and figures of eight, making the rhythm by the supple raising and lowering of the heel at each step. One has to really see these dances to sense the high dramatic element in them.

There is, however, some difference between the dances of men and women. While women execute a series of set figures, the mood being

pleasant and milder, men's dances are the creations of their own imagination centred on certain themes which they freely improvise. There is hardly any ensemble in the men's dances, each doing steps to suit his own mood. Nevertheless, these dances are exciting and made dramatic at times like caricatures, showing exaggerated pictures of events in everyday life, for which they don all kinds of accessories.

But all dances are executed quite strictly to rhythm. The more the excitement, the quicker the tempo, the shorter the dance steps, the less the ground covered. For now, the dancers jump, hop, turn and twist. Then the beat is stamped out by the forward foot and accentuated by the alternate flexing and stiffening of the knee, and even manipulation of the shoulders to keep up with the rhythm.

One of their favourites is the peacock dance, in which men carry bows and arrows, and tie honey-baskets on to their hip. Incorporated in this is the entire gamut of a hunt, the creeping through the jungle, seeking cover behind trees, crouching for a shot at a peacock, the sudden freezing on sighting the prey, the aiming of the arrow and the final drawing of the bow.

The *Aripilla Ata* (meaning dancing-girl's dance) portrays an amorous adventure. Women don't participate in this dance, the only female role being taken by a man who dresses in a sari for the occasion, and comes carrying a rolled-up goatskin under the arm. The man carries a knife and a basket on his hip. The dance opens with a courtship, the girl keeping two or three paces away. But as the drummers warm up and the rhythm becomes faster, the dancers move excitedly, one pursuing the other. Eventually, the woman gets close enough to the man to caress and fondle him.

The *Konda Muselata* (the dance of the black-faced monkey) is performed with no properties. The men clench their fists, swing their arms like clubs and dance with bent knees, probably in imitation of monkeys. Another dance, *Gumarikai Ata* (gourd dance), in which a man ties a gourd by a short string to his hair to hang down his back between his shoulders, while another chases him with a long stick trying to smash the gourd. The performance consists in the man with the gourd dodging among other dancers, turning the head swiftly and sharply, making the gourd jump up and down, swinging sideways to evade the pursuer with the stick, while women keep moving their hands in a whirl. Sometimes a woman sings a solo as an accompaniment.

The Chenchus are very proud of their damsel, Chenchita or Chen-

chu Lakshmi, as she was later called when God Vishnu as Narasinha married her. The episode is immortalized in song and drama to boost the Chenchu morale up. The epic story of Chenchu Lakshmi or Chenchita, as she is popularly known, is as follows.

Vishnu descended on earth in one of his periodical manifestations, this time as half man and half lion, to destroy the powerful king, Hiranaya Kashapu, and save his son, the god's devotee. While wandering in the forests of Nallamal to cool his rage, he saw Chenchita, the daughter of the local chieftain, and was greatly attracted by her. She was an expert hunter with complete command over the bow and arrow. Chenchita, taking him to be a jungle lion, kept aiming her arrows at him but they proved futile. When he came close and got hold of her hands, he got transformed into a handsome young man who won her heart. She hid him in a cave for sometime, but finally, when there was going to be a showdown between Narasinha and the tribal chief, sage Narada intervened, and Chenchita was finally given in marriage to Narasinha. Narada had actually been given the responsibility by Vishnu's wife, Lakshmi, to locate and bring him back to her. So Vishnu as Narasinha returned to his abode with Chenchita whom he now named Chenchu Lakshmi. The first wife, Adi Lakshmi, was, however, very contemptuous of the new bride's heritage, and Chenchita deeply insulted by this affront, walked out. But she was finally persuaded to reconcile herself to her fate. This sad end is immortalized in stone in the famous temple of Ahobila Narasinha, where the images of Narasinha and Adi Lakshmi stand side by side in the inner chamber, while the proud and spirited Chenchita is left standing in the outer part of the temple.

Chapter Two

Tribalism in India

13 The Todas of Tamil Nadu

Origin

The origin of no other Indian tribe is shrouded in such a mystery as of the Todas, who live in the picturesque and green-surfaced Nilgiris, blue mountains, 5,000-7,000 feet high. However, the story Todas themselves relate is one of the simplest in tribal lore. They rose from the ground, and when they die, they go to Amnor, situated where the sun sets and where their buffaloes join them to provide milk.

The Todas have been a puzzle to many anthropologists and sociologists for their physiognomy, temperament, costume, habitation, way of life, etc., none of which bears comparison with any other Indian tribe. Very tall, erect in gait, face described as Assyrian, clear almond-tinted skin and easy grace, they have a severely simple and patriarchal life flavoured by primeval grandeur. All men have beards, for shaving is taboo.

Habitation

On the fringe of the undulating plateau, at the top of the Nilgiris, enclosed by forbidding crags covered by wild trees, they live in their tiny huts. They are unique in shape, the roofs thatched with grass

and bamboo fastened with split cane, structured in curved outline like the tilt of a wagon, brought to an angle at the top with a wooden ridge pole, while the two end-walls are invariably gabled. The entrance is in the middle of the gabled wall, closed at night either with a flat stone or a solid slab of wood, kept firmly down by a stick thrust vertically into the floor. It is so fantastically small that you have to practically crawl through. Each house is only a single cabin and more living space is added by constructing a cabin next to it, but no direct communication exists between the two. It seems natural that the Todas use the same term for the house and the room. A collection of these, and they are very few, form a small settlement called mand. Besides the hut, each family has a grassy land called arsh, but it also has a share in the village land. Close by is the cattle pen securely fenced by a wall. Each mand has a dairy with two compartments, the outer as the residence of the dairyman, and the inner for storage of milk and its chief products. Here again, the entrance will be a cubit high and a cubit and half broad. A strange fact is that though the Todas are wholly pastoral, eschewing all other vocations, they are a very settled community.

Their costume consists of a very long piece of thick white cloth woven with black and red stripes at the two ends filled by highly decorative embroidery. This piece is simply worn round the loins, and then thrown over the shoulder very much like a Roman toga. Men and women wear the same dress. Stitched cloth is taboo, though it is coming into use. Equally taboo are caps and turbans.

Their staple diet is inevitably milk and its products. They are not normally flesh-eaters, and the flesh of a female cattle is taboo as it yields milk. There is, however, supposed to be an annual ceremonial killing and eating of a male calf, but it is done very secretly in the recesses of the woods. Their devotion to the buffalo seems like some kind of a monogamy, for the Todas will not breed any other animals. Unlike other tribals, they have not devised any weapons of destruction, not even the common trap. Their buffaloes, those only partially tamed, seem to have been conditioned to defend themselves and their young through their own daring skills and methods. In keeping with this tenor is their aversion to hunting. The tiny entrance to their cabins is probably a means of protection against attacks from men and beasts alike, since they are defenceless.

Social Customs: Marriage

The proposal is made by the boy's guardian to the girl's party, the main negotiating point being the bride price which is paid in cattle. The only unusual factor here is that the bride's father, in return, gives a similar gift with these words: "We are all relations. I don't crave your property since you have proved your sincerity. I will give you buffaloes in return." Here a figure is named.

The girl's father indicates his consent by lightly touching the boy's forehead with the front part of his foot saying, "I give." The girl's consent has not only to be obtained but she seems to have the final voice too. The two first come together for a kind of a twenty-four hour trial marriage with a separate house given to them to live by themselves, the girl's mother providing the food. If the girl is not prepared to live with the man, he goes away, but she, however, has to pay a penalty. Otherwise, the man gives her a necklace and a new mantle. Henceforth, they carry on as husband and wife. If the man has a brother or brothers or a very near relative living with them, by mutual consent, the girl can also accept them as husband, and they will then share in the bride price. It is said that wife lifting is not unknown.

Birth

When the woman is pregnant, in her seventh month she goes with her husband into the woods and places a lamp at the foot of a tree. While kneeling before it, she receives from her husband a bow and arrow made by him which she salutes by bowing over them. Then she takes them up and asks him: "What is the name of your bow"? He repeats the name three times (each clan probably has its own name), after which she deposits them at the foot of the tree. The couple is supposed to spend the night under the tree. The advent of the bow and arrow seems incongrous since the Todas neither hunt nor use them for any known purpose.

Death

When a person is about to die, he or she is wrapped up in a new toga, covered with ornaments to make the dead "respectable," as it is termed. There are no prayers nor any rites except giving a drop or

two of milk and a little food like roast grain and sugar for the journey. The body is carried in a bier, made of branches, to the kedu mand where the cattle belonging to the dead are assembled along with the relatives and friends. In fact, the funeral is known as hase kedu, which literally means green funeral. The kedu mand consists of a stone cattle pen and a village dairy-type hut. Here women prepare food, while the pyre is got ready. A little bell is hung around each animal which is pushed towards the bier with the command: "Go with him."

The people assembled come one by one and throw soil thrice at the bier and the cattle saying, "Let him go into the soil," and the hand of the corpse is raised to touch the horn of every animal. The body is laid on the pyre with its face down after swinging it thrice. The people around cry out, "You are going to Anmor, may you have milk to drink, may all be well with you," and a lock of hair is cut. The fire is lit by igniting sticks by friction. Later, a piece of the half-burnt skull is picked and, together with the piece of hair, deposited in a corner of the house for subsequent ceremonies.

The ashes are buried in a little hole together with whatever odd objects are left after the body is consumed, such as metal pieces. The hole is then closed and water poured over it, and a stone placed to cover it. The earthen vessel, from which the water is poured, has to be broken. A quaint custom regarding death is that the dead person is never mentioned in a conversation.

Religion

Being predominantly pastoral, their religion, like their socio-economic life, seems centred around their cattle, and if one watches them in their daily life, one sees their close proximity to their remote ancestors. For, after all, man's beliefs and the ritual observances that arise from them have their roots in his everyday needs and functions, and it is through this deep relationship that many of their functions have taken on an aura of sanctity. The Todas have no deities to court or appease. They believe in one Usuru Swamy, the exalted one. They have spirits, ghosts, but no elaborate supernatural pantheon, so the ceremonies are rather rudimentary.

What hunting and crops are to other tribes, cattle breeding, milk production and everything pertaining to this, are to the Todas. The buffalo is sacred, for it is the foundation of milk, a divine fluid com-

ing as a special gift from god. Hence breeding and cattle-care, especially milching, are highly elevating functions which breed some fine specimens. Some kind of a communication is said to exist between them and the animals through which they understand and respond to each other.

They do not breed bulls. They give them away, when young, to their neighbours, the Badagas and Kotas, for they are averse to selling their animals because of their religious sentiment. A matter of interest to note is that only the cattle attached to *tirier*, the holy mund, can wear bells, and these animals are known as bell cows and treated as sacred. Though a herd varies from ten to sixty buffaloes, only one to three bell cows are attached to a tirier. They are said to be the direct descendents in the female line from a sacred ancestor whose origin, identity or story seem to have got lost in the inscrutable vapours of the blue mountains. To a lay eye, they don't show any distinctive marks or characteristics to mark them out. Every tirier has to have at least one bell cow, but if per chance she dies without an issue, one is procured from another tirier possessing an extra one for replacement. It is said that if replacement is not effected, the mund itself has to be broken up and the herd amalgamated with that of another tirier, revealing the overwhelming importance attached to heredity. This event is celebrated with great eclat marked by a ceremonial lasting three days, when the priest waves a bell round the head of the adopted bell cow, morning and evening, whispering these words into her ear, "What a fine cow your predecessor was, how well she supported us with her milk, won't you supply us in a like manner? You are a deity amongst us, don't let the tirier go to ruin, let one become a thousand. Let all be well, let us have plenty of calves and plenty of milk."

During the ceremonies, the bell is kept tied to her back all the time. On the final day, it is removed and lodged at the priest's house, and never tied again during her lifetime. These deep sounding bells too seem to have an entity and existence of their own, for they are supposed to have come originally from Amnor, the world beyond, and therefore, deified and venerated as Konka Der, bell god, or Mani Der.

Relic God

They are not permitted to be touched by anyone, even viewing them

is restricted. The tirier herd is regarded as more sacred than other herds. In the Toda memory, they must be the direct descendents down the line from the original sacred herd. When the herd is replenished, each animal is isolated in a pen and kept only on water for twenty-four hours.

Each tirier is incharge of a priest called *palal* a milk man, and an ascetic herdsman, *kavilal*, a guard. A large-sized herd has more than one kavilal. They are selected from a particular clan styled as "sons of god." While holding these offices, they have to live away from their families and give up even their personal names. The palal commands respect from all as supreme, and even his father has to bow before him. But he is free to abandon this office anytime he wishes to. His initiation is marked by severe ordeals. He has to spend eight days in a forest, stripped of all his clothing, with just fire-wood for warmth. His only nourishment then is juice squeezed out of the bark of the tude tree into a leaf cup. Drinking it is also a ceremonial. He has to raise it with his right hand to his forehead in salutation to Konke, drink off the contents, then pass the empty cup over his head and left shoulder, and finally deposit it behind his right side. This is repeated three times, using a fresh cup each time. He then rubs his body all over with the bark left over, and takes a dip in a stream.

The palal observes his duties handed down to him meticulously. Every morning when he enters the inner room which is the dairy, he lights a little ghee-lamp with five wicks and places it in a niche opposite the bells hanging from the roof by a pronged stick. Then he approaches the animals holding the wand in his right hand, while the pail hangs by his fingers. He salutes raising this hand to his forehead, then making his leg like a pivot, he moves his whole body from right to left, tracing an arc as it were, thereby covering the entire herd in the pen, standing erect, never bending, bowing after he has gathered the milk. He then cups his hand and sprinkles over the bells three times as he chants sacred named with each libation, which only he is permitted to uttter. Before departing, he replenishes the ghee in the lamp to keep the flame alive. There is a great deal of sanctity about the milk of the sacred herd, and the milk vessels are not to be touched by anyone else. Nor is the surplus milk ever sold. Only the ghee extracted from it is exchanged for domestic provisions. The pala alone can milk the cattle, and if the herd is too large for him to manage, he is assisted by a fellow pala.

Two guardians preside over each village dairy, the palakarpal, who corresponds to the pala and is also drawn from the Peiki clan, but he is not endowed with the same holy aura; the other is an attendant called vorshal. They also have to go through purification rites before they take on their duties. The palakarpals are distributors of the milk they draw, as also the making of the ghee for the mand. Moreover, only they and their companion, can enter the dairy known as pathohi. As the only man in the service of the cattle, a palakarpal has to says, "I adore thee" three times when he salutes it.

E Tud Mand, as it is called, is where their most treasured articles are stored, like relics of ancestors, objects connected with heroic acts like a hatchet. It is also used for settling community disputes. It is where votive offerings of animals are made in fulfilment of vows, so it has usually a large accumulation of animals.

They have two regular temples, maybe three or four for the whole tribe. The structure has a concealed thatched roof, circular in shape, the apex being crowned by a large stone for steadying or keeping out the rain, with four cubits high walls of stout planking. The area is about fourteen by sixteen cubits, surrounded by a massive wall of uncut stones put together without any binding. The inner space is divided into two sections by a thick wall rising right up to the roof. It too has a tiny doorway known as boath.

Their only known place of pilgrimage is Mukurti, one of the high peaks in the Nilgiris, where they assemble on a holy day to celebrate.

Cultural Forms

The Toda language sounds like a string of clipped words. Though tribal songs have some basic themes and ideas in common, some of them are distinctive. The Toda songs may be named among them. In fact, those who have studied these songs tend to call them enigmatic. The enigma is that no matter what the theme, occasion or who sings or whom it is addressed, a buffalo name has to be used in a vocative form.

The metric structure in Toda song or oral poetry, as it may be called, is probably the simplest to be found in any verse form. Each unit consists of three syllables which may comprise one or two or three words. Nonetheless, from this simple base is built up a complicated structure, but on principles other than mere metrical.

The striking features about their structure may be defined as follows. No sentence may be uttered without being paired with another exactly parallel in syntactic structure and number of units. Every theme that touches life is woven into a song, from dairy ceremonial to wife-stealing. It seems that given the technique and interest in songs, almost anybody breaks out into a song, for each notable event seems provided with a set pattern of phrases.

Dairy ceremonials are accompanied by dance and songs. In dances, there is usually a chief composer who may sing the first half of each of a two-dimensional structure, and a large group may split up to perform antiphonally. There is a marked preference for group singing. Some are sung only in pairs when the song goes something like this: "Settled compensation for each man, made a wife for each man," obviously referring to a wife-stealing incident and the settlement thereafter. Another one is: "Thorn bushes and fallen stones", to mark the disrepair of a neglected dairy, and mentioned as a pair. In fact, mentioning in pairs is a definite feature. For instance, children and calves are paired, as the crying child and the bellowing calf, so are dairy bells and the axe, also the dairy man's garment and the cane, though in some of these cases it is not easy to visualize the pairing.

The technique also dictates all syntactic constructions that may occur on the basis of the paired words and units. There seems to be, in effect, a two-dimensional poetic language, the syntactic construction in one dimension and the required paired construction in the other. Occasionally, a complication may arise in the intereweaving of two such structures when the first two halves are sung, then the second two. All this is of course purely oral.

Their most spectacular art is embroidery. In the sylvan silences of this seclusion, the Toda women seem to have evolved a rich ornamental style of embroidery stitching, distinctly their own, which they call pugur, flower. Geometrical in pattern, the stitching is done on long cotton shawls called poothkuli, worn in Roman toga fashion. They are specially woven with one inch thick red and black band at intervals of six inches at the end of the shawl piece. The embroidery stitches are worked thick and close in black and red threads between these woven stripes, counting the weft, until it takes on the appearance of an embossed weave.

The designs are symbolic. The most important is the buffalo horn, with deep religious significance. A beautiful design is of a little box

of theirs called Metti Kanpugur. One has been named after one of their ancient priests, Izhadvinpuguti. But many are called after wild flowers which abound their hillside. A touching one is Resdazhpugar, named in memory of a girl who fell off a precipice and died.

Chapter Two

Tribalism in India

14 The Lepchas of Sikkim

The Lepchas, a trib einhabiting the southern Himalayan slopes, are the original inhabitants of Sikkim, and they call themselves Rong. Though they now form a very small percentage of the population, they have been quite a crucial factor in that country's politics. Zongu, forming perhaps one eighth of Sikkim, is their habitation. It is almost fortified by a rugged mass of snow-capped Himalayan peaks, making it into a world apart. The Lepchas living in Darjeeling district seem to be even more obscure. Unlike some tribals, the Lepchas have no tales of their origin. They only trace the home of their ancestors to the forbidding region of Kanchenjunga called Mayel.

There are local legends, however, on this theme. One that is widely accepted is that every family originated from the union of a lake and a mountain, the former being the mother. Offerings are thus made to lakes periodically. In fact, their mythology is woven greatly round this sort of relationship. For instance, a stream called Lungtung stands for the birth of male children, while a well called Rung-Zel Oonglap is associated with female progeny. The latter, however, has a special supernatural guard, a boy named Sathun Ong.

Though superficially they may seem Mongoloid, in fact they are with more pronounced features, high cheek-bones, sharp and fine eyes and rather thin lips. They are short and their gentle appearance is rather appealing. They wear their hair long in pigtails which are

coiled round the head on formal occasions.

Basically they are a gentle people, with their ethics and cultural attitudes founded on a community of equal citizenship. But due to isolation, divorced from the larger social organism, these qualities seem to have grown rather anaemic, having lost the ability to face challenges. Their language, largely monosyllabic, with no grammar, has an alphabet of its own, and is said to be one of the oldest speeches.

The original name of the Lepchas is said to have been Ne Lyang, land of caves, for the region where they first took shelter, had extensive caves. Later, as they started cultivation, it became Denjong, land of rice, millet, maize.

Their history, however, commences from the time of their King Turve who reigned some 500 years ago. Three generations later, after Tur Ayek died, the throne was seized by a Tibetan. But he and his successors married Lepcha girls, adopted Lepcha ways and soon got absorbed.

The Lamas who came later proved aggressive proselytizers. Not content with changing their religion, they destroyed Lepcha literature, distorted their old faith, and generally weakened the country.

Though now converts to Lamaism, as subjects the Lepchas became only second-class citizens, and were not eligible for important Lamaistic positions. The Sikkimese Bhutias annexed all the fertile land. Then the 18th century saw large influx of Nepalese settlers. At first, the Bhutias made common cause with the Lepchas against the newcomers. But finally lost out to the Nepalese. The Lepchas, evidently being the weakest link, got pushed to the remotest interior and, in course of time, the entire Zongu area became the private estate of the royal Sikkimese ruler.

The Lepcha village consists of scattered settlements with no geographical boundary or focal point. Each village has a name. Here they cling to the steep sharp landscape, sheltered in tiny rectangular huts stuck into the rough crags, raised four feet above the ground on stone piles which go round three sides of the house, the place below the open side in the east shelteringd omestic animals. These clusters of huts amidst lush pastures are ablaze with coloured blossoms, especially rosy cherry blossoms, which against the backdrop of white snow, look most alluring. Made of plaster, bamboo and thatch, each house faces the north, with entrance from the east made of a pair of notched logs or rough steps. The floor is of woven bamboo but the

wealthy owners cover it with smothered planks. The bamboo walls are, however, covered with plaster.

Usually, the house consists of two rooms and an attic, the poor owners have just one, while the well-off ones have a storeroom too. The first room at the entrance is the kitchen, thop song, where there are slightly raised shelves or a bar set into the wooden floor in a corner to serve as sleeping beds at night and as seats during the day. The second room is the, de'ong which serves as a parlour or an altar for ceremonials. The bamboo balconies over the east and north sides are for family gatherings or household tasks. On the east and west sides, the roof is at a slightly lower angle to form a triangle filled with widely woven bamboo under the tree roof for ventilation and as a chimney. The kitchen consists of a built-up square of pounded earth and clay, about five feet in each direction and raised a foot above the ground where four upright stones are inserted to support the pots over the logs. There is a ledge of woven bamboo over the fire hanging from the rafters to serve as a storehouse with a trap-door attached.

Certain customs are strictly observed before launching on the house construction, like roads from south and west must be avoided as they are used by a devil, Deng Mong, so only north and east are preferred. A tree to the north should never be cut as opposed to the one in the south. It is considered bad if there is no hill between the north and the east, or if any standing water below the house reflects light, so some metal coin has to be thrown into it. It is inauspicious to have a juniper tree to the west, and so the list lengthens out. Next, the site itself has to be tested by the builder if it is propitious by digging up a little earth and then submitting it to the lama to read the signs from the stars of the holy book, Tongyoop. If found favourable, the site is consecrated by the lama by replacing the sample earth and offering cherkene, mixed grain floating in chi. The building work has to start always from the east.

When the house is ready, the Tashi Chene ceremony is performed by burning incense to pacify any evil spirits still lurking in the wood from their old habitat, the trees, or maybe lingering in the foundation below. A sacrifice is then made, and flesh from the right foreleg and left hindleg called gazook is given to the carpenters at work, followed by a formal ceremony with music, reciting, anointing and stamping of the pillars by the Chief Lama with a ground rice cone called Getti Thomu. Later, a mixture of rice and flour is thrown by

all at the pillars crying "Tashi Shu" to avert illness.

To some houses and fields, an ambivalent supernatural called Thyak-dum, "white-head," is taken to be attached. He is expected to bring wealth and prosperity if contented but can bring disaster if he is not. So initial control has to be gained over it. To do this, the Lepcha priest, Mun, goes into meditation to view it mystically. If controllable, incense and butter are burnt on embers first, then water sprinkled with a call to Thyak-dum to go away. If this fails, what is called lafe't sacrifice is made by placing three rows of ground corn on a wicker winnowing tray, covered with banana leaves, together with pieces of ginger, millet, wild bird, dried fish and chi in a buttered cup, and these are placed at a height. If all this fails, a miniature house called the Devil's is built on four bamboos where only the Mun can venture. When the new crop is ready, grain, meat, fish and silver money is offered—a strange custom is to keep an old pig penned which is offered as a sacrifice, later replaced by another one. The Devil houses are generally avoided, as the spirits are supposed to resent intrusion.

They have a small cultivation, too, of paddy, millet and maize for their own consumption. However, their main cash crop is cardamoms.

Every village has a headman known as mandal who officiates in all social affairs, from settling disputes to arranging marriages. He also officiated as the representative of the village to wait on the Maharaja of Sikkim, and convey the respect of the villagers under the old regime.

The original religious faith known as Mun still lingers along with a tinge of Lamaism. Though the Lepchas seem to worship nature, their concept is quite different. They believe that certain objects in nature are only manifestations of supernatural spirits, who, when good, like to dwell in fruit trees, yielding land, lakes and the like, whereas the evil ones dwell in barren lands or trees, waterfalls, rocks, etc. The habitation of these spirits is known by the same term Li by which they call their own home. They believe, however, that almost everything has a soul (the idea probably breathed into them by Lamaism), for according to them, there would be no life, growth, movement, in short, no animation without it. But for them, there is a difference in these souls and their own. The former are transient, that is, they don't reincarnate like those of human beings.

They avoid the dwelling place of the malevolents, lest they anger them by intruding. Simple acts like chopping a rock or felling a tree

may mean incurring their wrath. On such unavoidable occasions, certain offerings are made to them, like rice mixed with butter or burning juniper leaves as propitiation. But no sacrifices are offered. Some of the elaborate ceremonials of Mun are still observed. The Mun priest officiates on such occasions, especially warding off sickness during epidemics or establishing communication with spirits. When special rites are performed for physical afflictions, they have to be held away from the house of the sick person as the concentration on the disease-causing spirit may vitiate the air.

Their priest doctors called bifooas chant their legends called namthar with a certain cadence. The songs, Tongbor, are low-pitched. They pay respects to the serpent king called Murnyoba who is believed to have brought the water up on the earth from the nethermost land. They also believe heaven to be down below, not above, as others do.

There are proper Buddhist rituals performed too, obviously taken from the Tibetans, and even here the accompanying chants are in Tibetan, so are the robes they wear on these occasions. An unusual annual ceremony consists of carrying Buddhist scriptures from the village *gompa*, monastery, to a particular house in the village. Each year a new house is chosen for this purpose. The altar in the *de'ong*, parlour of worship, varies from a simple woven basket to an elaborate box, and can contain from a metal image to multiples, mostly miniature reproductions of the monastery ones, musical instruments, varied decorations and pigeon-holes on either side to hold the scriptures. The altar is the only object ornamented, except in big houses, where frescoes are painted on the external plaster with a little carving on the doors and windows. Prayers are recited there for two days, followed by a feast when beer flows freely. Even while chanting the Lama partakes beer, drunk from long wooden hollow containers with a bamboo pipe to serve as a straw. The celebration terminates with carrying the sacred books in a procession through the village up and down the sinuous mountain paths. It is led by a piper in a picturesque costume.

Social Customs and Ceremonials: Birth

Observance of rituals start for a pregnant woman from the fifth month, when the Mun performs cleansing of both the parents with a bunch of elephant grass in one hand and a fowl in the other. A curious belief is that the baby is called a rat child for the first three

days, and considered in the womb still. So pre-natal precautions are observed, which means the mother must not touch the ground and the father abstain from heavy work, and no outsider enter the house. After the child is officially born, the occasion is marked by a special feast, followed by a general cleansing of the house and burning of incense. The baby is then displayed on the mother's lap wearing a new apparel. Earlier, the usual offerings of grain, ginger, dried fish, cooked chicken, set on a winnowing tray covered by a banana leaf are made. Presents are given to the child by relatives. Finally, the Mun offers a sacrifice to the god of birth, Gek Ram, then waves the incense burner over the parents and others.

The Lepchas, too, tie coloured threads, white, black and red to the child's wrist as generally done everywhere, but with a difference. Here, a snail's shell is attached to the red thread. This is done by a woman who becomes an aunt to the baby, like a god mother. The same is transferred to a necklace tied around the neck, for it is a symbol of protection and stays until the child decides to throw it off. But the threads stay until they wear themselves off. The baby is also given its name now, usually the day of its birth. Curiously enough, cradles are never used and are, in fact, considered fatal.

Marriage

The initial overtures by the intended groom to the desired wife are the same as among many other tribes, with the mock driving of the former's party by the bride's sisters and girl friends with nettles and thorns, until they are pleased by worthy presents from him.

The Intending groom must carry gifts on his back to prove he can do manual labour. The girl's family priest, Boongthing, usually asks complex questions to the groom to test his ability.

A curious custom to note is that the bride's parents refrain from accompanying the marriage party to the groom's for the ceremony as a mark of sorrow over the parting of their daughter. The bride's party on its arrival offers first a scarf at the altar, and then it is regaled to a ceremonial meal known as "wiping away the bride's sweat." When the bride's party offers presents to the groom's party, there is a mock rejection with repeated insistence that they want only the bride, whereupon the bride's people assure "we have only brought these to make a sacrifice," and they are dedicated by the Mun, after which everyone partakes of them. This marks the acceptance of the

bride into the new family.

An elaborate ceremony, however, follows where the Lamas chant, burn incense and play on their instruments near the altar in the Lepcha parlour. A small altar is now erected and a coin, a scarf, and butter bowl with chi placed over it. Then the Mun dedicates an ox and narrates elaborately the story of the origin of the Lepcha marriage. The Mun exhorts the couple to love one another as he seeks blessings from the gods, hands over the butter bowl with the chi to the bride which she sips thrice, then the groom and the others also follow in the sipping. This is considered as the sacramental part of the marriage, and symbolizes a pact of relationship between the bride and the new community. She now becomes entitled to enter this village. The last sacrificial act is the killing of the ox with the bow and arrow by the bride's younger brother or some of her close relatives.

Now comes the interesting rite "receiving the bride," when the bride's go-between, Bek Bu, tells the bride as he holds a scarf in one hand and a coin in the other: "You have been married into this family, you are bound to it. The gods Tarbongbo, Naripnom and Komisthing originated it. Now you are bound with it. "With this, he puts the scarf round her neck and the coin into her hand. Next the village Mandal tries to find out the bride's Moong and Rum (family gods, evil spirits), and the Mun starts propitiating them thus: "We are giving this girl to you. If you are not good to her, we will take her back and punish you." Whereupon the groom's party gives elaborate assurances that they will treat her well. The ceremonial ends with the Lamas chanting an elaborate prayer over the couple called Ongshee Shet, which is a blessing for the next generation.

Though they have no story of their origin, they have a most interesting tale on how the institution of marriage came to be established, where the primeval parents are described. This has to be recited at every marriage, which is a long drawn-out affair as every paragraph is repeated, at times even more than once. Here is a brief resume of this tale.

In the Mun religion there is Itpomu, the creative mother, and her husband, Debu, whom the Lepchas believe live in the nether world. When Itpomu, the creator, had completed the job of creation, there were no husbands or wives. Her best progeny was a son called Tarbongbo, whom she nursed at her breast. When he grew older, he wanted to travel and see the world. He set out one morning but came back to her in the evening and lay on her lap to be suckled by her.

She then asked him to describe what he saw. He said he saw trees covered with fruits which the birds were eating. And she told him that if he was her son he must get a bamboo and thread to prepare traps to set them on trees to snare the birds. The boy went out the next three days to get the material and lay the trap. On the fourth day, he gathered the birds and happily presented them to his mother saying: "If they are good to eat, take them as repayment for your milk." The mother accepted them and said she found them good.

Next morning, he set out again to lay the trap, but when he went to collect his captives, to his chagrin he found a wooden penis in each trap, which he threw away in anger. On his return when he climbed on to his mother's lap to drink her milk, he sadly confessed that he had nothing to give her, and explained what had happened. She replied: "If you are my son, you will go back and hide yourself carefully so that even the birds cannot see you, and see who does this." As he sat watching the next day, a beautiful girl dressed in *kaji lasong*, nettle cloth, arrived and set herself making wooden penes. In great rage he went at her but she resisted, and in the struggle that ensued they rolled on together. This excited him to have sex relations with her. But she would not let him. So he let her go. He found out that her name was Na Rip Nom, and was the daughter of Talm Ta Mit. When he got back, he complained to his mother that he had to return empty-handed again. The mother explained to him that if he wished to possess this girl, he should seek the advice of his elder brother, Kom sithing. When Tarbong sought Komsithing, the latter explained that to get the girl he must pay the marriage price, *nyomsa afaar*, and make a sacrifice with chi-beer and butter. He enumerated the different things Tarbong would have to collect from various places like pig and a copper vessel from Nepal; the cloth Komo from Bhutan; a numbo, ring from Tibet; an ox from Sikkim; and millet from Mayel near Kanchenjunga.

When all these were collected, there was no fire to cook the millet, and fire was only in the land of demons between heaven and earth called Mashyok Matel, in the house of the smiths called Tangshyo Tangong Karvo. Komsithing then asked Tarbong to go and fetch fire, but Tarbong refused to go, lest he is devoured by the demons. So Komsithing announced that any living creature, even an insect, would be richly rewarded if it fetched fire for Tarbong. The bird, Kahryok To, gladly agreed. It flew there, and managed to pick up a brand in its beak. As it flew back, it grew hungry, so placed the brand on a

chestnut tree, while looking around for fruit. Suddenly, a gust of wind fanned the sparks from the brand into flame which flew into the whole tree and set it ablaze, singing the bird's face black and burning its long feathers, leaving only short stumps. As a result the bird was too ashamed to return.

Komsithing asked for another volunteer, and this time a flying insect, Taknyom Nomyor Nyon, volunteered. When it got to the smith's house it was empty, so it lay on its back by the fireside and, therefore, looked at the house upside down and the whole house took a somersault. When the smith returned and saw this, he searched for the culprit and tried to kill it but failed as the insect eluded him. In desperation he asked the insect what it had come for. The insect told him that he had come to fetch fire. The smith agreed to give it on the condition that his house was straightened again. The smith warned that it could never carry fire back in its mouth and, therefore, even though it picked up a brand in its mouth, the smith placed a flint and tinder on its back, explaining how a fire could be lit with it. Flying back, the insect felt tired and wished to rest. So it alighted at the foot of the Mong Ing Pong tree, and again the wind came, fanned the brand into a blaze and burnt the tree down. The insect, however, escaped with only a blackened face. Nevertheless, it flew back and helped Komsithing light a fire with the flint and tinder using dry grass. Thus, the millet was finally cooked in the copper vessel. Then they discovered that they had no yeast called Numli Nyou.

Once again Komsithing called for volunteers, for only one woman living in the plain could make yeast. This time the insect, Takder, offered himself. He found the woman carefully screening Takdar while making her yeast as she did not want him to learn the process. So he hit on a plan. He offered to remove the lice from her hair. As this operation proceeded, she fell asleep. Takdar then quietly ran off with the pot containing millet cooked with yeast. As he bolted, she opened her eyes. In her wrath she cursed that whoever partook of the yeast would get drunk and quarrel.

Komsithing now made the chi-beer, but as they did not have earthern pots they put it into baskets lined with leaves. Komsithing then asked Taknyon the reward he desired and the latter asked for plants Mangder and Sanghlo from the valley, which he was given. Takdar asked for the leavings at the bottom of the spoons and plates.

When the chi was ready, the question arose who to test it on, so

the snake Putsongbeu was chosen. When it was given the chi, it immediately fled away like lightning. This frightened everyone. So the snake Pamolbeu was given some and it straightaway started biting and killing people and animals. So a lock was quickly put on its mouth. Next, the chi was given to the snake, Poblyok Beu, who just fell senseless after drinking it. So they decided the chi was harmless. But butter needed to smear the edges of the chi containers was missing. So Itpomu was approached. She gave it in a bamboo tube, *yongtong*. Now all the gods and men assembled for the marriage of Tarbong and Naripnom. The gifts were kept on one side and the chi in nine containers on the other. So when a marriage is celebrated amongst the Lepchas, all the gods are worshipped and the same gifts given. Only when Tarbong married Naripnom could he possess her. That is how marriage among the Lepchas came into existence.

Crafts

The Lepchas are very dexterous with their hands, though they don't have too many crafts. Whatever little they do they show a great skill. Their main tool is the knife, made of iron about eighteen inches long and three inches wide with a wooden handle. A feature of this is that one whole side is a cutting edge while the tip is square, not pointed, and the whole thing goes into a bamboo scabbard slung by the side. As soon as a boy grows up, he is given a knife which stays with him always. It is used for almost everything from cutting down trees to carving meat. The women too carry a similar instrument, only it is a curved sickle thrust plain without a sheath into the sash round their waist at the back.

Their most important raw material is the bamboo grown in numerous varieties. Apart from its wide use in building, a popular item in bamboo is a drinking mug, *patyool*. It is made from a ten-inch section of an old and hollow bamboo, each mug being cut off just below a joint where the natural growth forms a bottom for the vessel. Chi is drunk from it through a straw, *pa hip*, consisting of a section of a small growing bamboo with the pith at the end loosened to form a filter. Hunting weapons, trinkets and a whole lot of other items are made from bamboo.

Leaves act as a substitute for plates, but for ceremonial purposes only wooden plates are used, as the Lepchas hardly make any pottery. Mats and baskets are made of bamboo and reeds largely by men, but

some of the finest ones are made by women. Their textile weaving is very fine, done in striped patterns, either over plain surface or patterned background. Zonga was once famous for this multicoloured cloth which made their apparel. But in recent years, weaving has declined with the growing use of mill-made cloth and adoption of common trousers and kurtas.

Although painting is one of the distinguishing Lepcha arts, it is exclusive, confined only to the trained lamas who spend about nine years learning it. The process is as follows. The artist provides himself with a piece of oiled wood covered with black earth which is laid on a thin layer of white powder, and when scratched with a pointed stick, it results in a black outline that can easily be wiped clean to draw again. When students are learning, the teacher makes a drawing which the pupils keep on copying until it is considered perfect. A whole repertoire of sacred pictures is thus acquired. Later, other figures are learned by copying existing models. According to the Lepchas, pictures are approximations to a divine original, varying in merit chiefly by their nearness to the ideal and the fineness of the workmanship. Certain objects used in religious worship are fashioned by the lamas with great dexterity and skill. The most outstanding is the den or the house of supernaturals. It consists of varied and complicated designs in various coloured thread twisted round bamboo, and fastened on to an upright bamboo. Models of different supernaturals of life-like appearance are made out of paste of different grains or of clay, and decorated with natural or coloured butter, different coloured wool, pieces of thread and cloth. Geometrical designs are also scratched on green bamboo-containers with the point of a knife.

Musical Instruments

Amongst the Lepchas, musical instruments for ceremonial purposes are played by the lamas who are known as Tong-peun-bu. They play the conch shells; the galing, a metal instrument between a clarionet and a trumpet; the pak doong, a long telescopic trumpet; kongling, a flute.

Chapter Two

Tribalism in India

15 The Lakhers of Mizoram

The Lakhers live in villages on the heights, the villages perching on the slopes. Their villages are named after physical features like, *Longphia*: flat stone; *Vahia*: a small hornbill, as this is a haunt of these birds; *Laki*: winding path from the road leading to it; *Tisonpie*: water scarce; *Latentla*: cotton place as it has wonderful cotton crop; *Thiahra*: palm fan.

When a new house is to be built, the *amahmang*, sacred vessels and articles, used in rituals are hung up carefully on a tree in the garden or outside the village. During this period, the owner must not attend any death ceremony, lest the vessels get defiled. When the house is ready, the eldest climbs up the ladder first. Then he holds out the hoe, and other members follow holding on to it, for the iron hoe is a symbol of strength to ensure each member's health and the security of the house. Next day, the owner nets small fish, picks small pebbles along with them around the walls saying: "May the posts I have erected and the walls I have built be as strong as the stones and the wind may not blow the house away." After this, the sacred vessels, amahmang, are brought and a sacrifice known as Kozang is offered.

The amahmang consists of an earthenware beer-pot called pana berai, a bamboo siphon with wooden joints called pakona; clay saucers for beer called beikang; twin wooden plates carved out of one block of wood called Kannaṭlaphei; a gourd spoon phatla for liquids

Pahavav; a wooden chair for the Kazangpa, the deity; two bamboo stools called maisas laid across on a wild plantain, a small cloth on a bamboo-frame for the Kazangpa as head dress, three small gourd beer pots called hrokha, reeds for sucking the beer; bei, a clay vessel for meat. Sometimes, a decorated dao, a turban, a skirt, bronze vessels, amber necklace, a chestnut pole, a bow and two arrows, one always in the bow the other used for sacrifice, are added. All articles are kept on a bamboo mat while sacrifice is offered. Normally, these are kept in a miniature house or basket just under the roof over the main bed. When these articles are under preparation and a death occurs in the village, they are all destroyed and made afresh. Nobody else is allowed to touch them.

The Lakhers do not normally employ any priest. They perform the rites themselves. Only for one festival Fleulia, a village sacrifice at the slope of the hill is done by a priest.

Dress

The Lakher man's main dress consists, to begin with, of a loin cloth which for everyday wear is called dua kalapa; for ceremonial occasions, dua ah. The former is three and half yards long and one and half yards wide, and is simple. The tying is more complicated, one end after passing through the legs is wound thrice round the waist to form a belt and the other end tucked into folds at the back.

The dua ah is a decorative piece of the same kalapa which is heavily ornamented with embroidery in a variety of tinted silks. It is so worn that the two embroidered ends hang in front and behind.

These cloth pieces are woven in different patterns. The finest among them is chenlopang with a dark blue background and two white lines running down the middle, while the entire fabric is heavily embroidered in silk depicting designs that are supposed to be the eyes of different birds and beasts. It is only the chief and his family that enjoy the privilege of wearing this. Another cloth in this aristocratic category is cheunapang; this has a red back rounded with red and yellow embroidery. The others are simpler. The viapang is a plain dark blue cloth with a red stripe down the middle; the zenpang is a thin cloth with white stripes on a black background. The commonest is chiaraku plain white cloth with two broad black running stripes. The plain white one usually worn is called pangzapa. All these except the dua are worn by men and women alike.

The Lakher men have a distinctive head-dress, a kind of a turban called khuthang. The ones worn by the older men differ from those worn by the younger ones. For special purposes, a particular one is worn like the sawlakia for dancing and the kazangpina for sacrificial ceremonies. This formal khuthang, which consists of white cloth four yards long and a foot wide, has an inch wide black stripe woven into it. First, the hair is made into a knot and worn just over the forehead. One end of the khutang is wound round it and tied at the back of the head from right to left. It is then taken round the hair knot as many times as required to use up the cloth and the end so adjusted that the black stripe is in exact line with the wearer's nose. The Lakher's indispensable item is an embroidered bag always hung over the left shoulder to carry water, flask, pipe and the tinder box.

The khuthang worn by the youth is smaller with no black stripe in it. A brass hairpin runs through the hair knot and a lacquered comb at the back of the knot and a lacquered bamboo hairpin is stuck between the comb and the top knot. In recent years, the youth also like to wear coloured ribbons round the top knots. There is a strong feeling against using one another's combs and hairpins as this might transfer the ailments of one to the other. The Lakhers pay great attention to their hair and take pride in keeping it greased and shiny. After the age of nine, no boy's hair is cut. Any man whose hair is cut cannot participate in sacrifices. In the days of tribal wars, the warriors used to bind their hair over the forehead and put a red cloth over it. The story behind it is this. One day a squirrel and the horned owl were fighting, and the squirrel bit the top of the owl's head which turned fierce with blood. The squirrel, frightened by this sight, escaped and the owl quietly ate up the squirrel's young ones. So the Lakhers take on the role of the horned owl with a bloodstained head and the promise of bandaging heads.

The Lakher women wear a dark blue petticoat with its lower end embroidered in silk, which is displayed when a shorter skirt is worn over it known as hnangra, or if the wearer likes it, a brighter one also embroidered and called vishnang. Women from the chief's family have coloured beads and cowries embroidered on their skirts and worn on ceremonial occasions. In this, the skirt may be dark blue. Three rows of cowries are fixed on it followed by a row of small green beads and several rows of different kinds of beads and seeds, and finally, brass pieces shaped like matches. The skirt is completed either with red tassels or the wings of a lustrous green beetle. While in the top

row the beads cling to the cloth, lower down they hang, strung on a piece of cotton like a fringe. They are made by women in the aristocratic families, and form a part of the dowry.

The upper part of man's body is clothed in a small sleeveless jacket, kohrei, open or loosely tied in front, and barely able to cover the chest. When they are not working, a long piece of cloth is drawn over the left shoulder and the chest under the right arm. Women wear their hair in a bun held back by a heavy brass hairpin called hokrei. This is like the men's sakia made by the cere perdu process. Women also wear the lacquered hairpins.

Young girls while dancing wear a high headgear made of brass uprights, a foot and two inches long and half an inch thick, cast in the cere perdu process to devise a frame. This is pierced closely with holes through which strings run with beads on them in a vertical position until the crown is fully covered with beads. The lowest row of beads rests on the wearer's head directly. Sharp bamboo spikes are stuck between the top three rows of beads which are attached with wax parrot's tail feather, the quills of which are covered with lead foil.

The Lakhang is woman's own property and remains with her over which man has no control.

Ornaments

Amongst the Lakhers, only young men from the age of nine until the time of their marriage wear metal ear-rings called haumirahen, which the Lakhers make themselves. They are made by pounding clay on a stone mixed with water and a bamboo stick cut to the size of the intended ear-ring. It is then pressed into the clay till its end is level with the rim of the hole made by it in the clay. The stick is then pulled out, and the lump of clay is cut in half to leave half the impression of the stick on each portion of the severed lump. A pattern is cut in the clay on each half with a knife and the mould dried in the sun, after which the two half pieces are tied together with a fibre. Into this, molten metal is poured mixed with pig's fat, which is supposed to quicken the melting process. When dry, the mould is broken and ear-rings emerge. They also wear bead-necklaces, especially of pumtek, a black and white bead, oval or flat in shape.

The Lakher women also wear ear-rings called hawmirahen and, in addition, two other kinds made of wood called thangrahen, also made by them with their knife, shaped like a stud with the bead ornamented

by lacquer and metal. The core is made of lac, while the surface is of silver or white metal.

Only one kind of bracelet made by them called rahongpachhi consists of brass beads strung on a cotton string. The beads are made from scrap, melted and hammered into paper-thin sheet, and cut into strips, an inch long and half an inch wide. Each strip is then wound round a piece of iron wire and tapped into a round bead, then pulled off the wire. These are worn in circles of two or three. Viachipang are bracelets made of small black and white beads and worn round the wearer's wrist. Another one made of green opaque beads called chhirang is also worn the same way. The young women have taken increasingly to glass and metal bangles. One other ornament is the kiclong, a conch shell, on which the Lakhers draw small circles with a dot. It is done by manipulating two sharp thin pieces of iron and colouring the central dot, while the circle is darkened by lamp black. The kiclong is worn at the back of the neck along with beads hanging in front. This ornament is, however, not common, for conch shells are not easy to come by.

The Lakher women wear numerous brass bells round the waist and lower down. They are called hrakhaw, and made of links joining into each other but flexible. The ones made in bell metal are called chaiphipha. The number of belts is said to be indicative of the wealth of the wearer. Women keep them shining by regularly polishing them. The chongchi is made of a brass spiral tubing and attached by a string that runs through the centre. Another bell made of white metal in small circular metal rings is called saka.

These women love bead neck-laces. The sisai consists of small and long red opaque beads, thirty or forty of these being worn at a time. The dapachi worn in five strings is composed of white glass beads, also small and long. The lavaw made of hard round white beads is worn only in one string of forty. The most expensive are the cornelians called naba, and used to make a single long necklace of eighty beads.

Crafts

A characteristic item the Lakhers carry is the aaroawng, a nicotine water-bottle. All Lakhers, men and women alike, sip nicotine water continuously. It is usually retained in the mouth for about ten minutes, then spat out. It enables them, they claim, to carry on for quite

sometime without food, and also preserves gums and teeth in good condition. It is generally made out of gourd. There is another made out of the mithun horn but used only by the chiefs. The former are made by cutting off the top of the gourd and crushing the pulp inside with a small stick, after which sand mixed with water is added and the gourd left to stand for two or three days. The pulp is again crushed with a stick and then poured out. The gourd, now hollow, is filled with water and left to stand for three days when the water is thrown out. This process in continued until the water gets clear to the tastes without bitterness. Then the gourd is ready to carry the nicotine water fitted with a cork for closing it.

The mithun horn is made by cutting off its base leaving eight or nine inches to the tip, and filling the hole with a wooden plug. The point of the horn is then cut off and closed with a woodenstop per attached to the horn flask by a string. The whole flask with the plug is lacquered in red and black. Wooden flasks are also used, ornamented with lacquer and solder. The black lacquer is obtained from the bark of a tree which oozes out a red hue but turns black after a second coating, while red lacquer is obtained by mixing red powder with the juice of the bark. The tinder boxes called pachi chilong are made from wood. One has a plain body and a hide cover, the other is lacquered black all over. In each box, the two component parts are kept together by a string that runs through two holes cut at each end, and each box carries flint, steel and tinder, the last in the shape of a dried sap of a palm known as sasai.

The Lakhers must have known about fire-arms for a long time, since the Burmese, whose border the Lakhers live near, seem to have possessed them from at least the 15th century. The Lakhers tastefully decorate their guns with the stocks lacquered black and red. The powder box made of mithun horn is also decorated with white metal. They call the box zaidung In order to make it, the base of the horn is closed with a wedge of hardwood, and the centre covered with a larger brass stud. The wedge itself is covered with red and black lacquer, inlaid with tinfoil. The horn at the point is cut off and plugged with a stopper attached to the horn by a brass band. Lower down, the red, black and silverfoil ornamentation is continued. The flask is worn on a cloth sling attached to two brass slots. The sling is also decorated with cowries sewn in three rows of three each with a star of four cowries between each group. The wooden stopper is covered with a brass stud attached to the body of the flask with a string.

The ornamentation calls for much elaboration and a lot of patient effort to produce such an aesthetically fine effect as this. The place to be decorated is covered first with black lacquer when the paint is still wet, the required patterns are then made by sticking tiny pieces of solder on it, delicate enough to warrant handling by tweezers. It is amazing to see their symmetry since the only tool used is a small knife. Sometimes, even the tweezers are dispensed with, and the tiny solder pieces are picked up on the sharp edge of the knife or with the point of a metal hairpin and set in position on the lacquer. When the solder has been applied and fixed in the required patterns, red lacquer is added.

The Lakhers, both men and women, are great smokers. Hence great care is bestowed on the pipe, both having their own style in pipes. Tobacco is generally grown where fire is the strongest, since a well-burnt ground is supposed to supply the best leaves. A man's pipe called ongmabei is made out of a two-year old bamboo. A section of the bamboo is cut on each side of the joint to leave a two and half inch piece, an inch above and inch and half below the joint. A small hole is made in the middle of the joint and a piece of gourd so cut as to cover an inch length. A hole is then made exactly at the bend on the knot to prepare for the mouthpiece made of a thin bamboo piece. The tobacoo is put in the upper part of the bowl to enable the smoke to pass through the hole in the knot into the chamber enclosed with the gourd, and then through the mouthpiece into the smoker's mouth.

Amongst the Lakhers, basketry is a very important handiwork. Some of it is quite outstanding, almost a work of art. There seems to be an infinite variety in the plaiting of baskets, each having its own name and special function, both in bamboo and cane. Articles, such as mats, trays and sieves are also made in different styles, but mostly of bamboo. The ones they make are, too many to enumerate, only a few can be described. Even these can barely indicate the wide range of their handiwork. The baikai, used for collecting the grain after harvest, is two feet high and two feet in diameter at the top, but tapers down to eight inches square at the bottom.

Saikhua, a small basket for measuring rice and meant to hold two pounds when full, is made of very finely split bamboos. Talabai is a large round one used as a measure for paying dues in the form of grain or while offering for sale. The basket is lined with split bamboos, and is a cubit each in height and diameter. The corners are strengthened

with four split bamboos. The phavaw is a small shallow basket used for holding food to be eaten by a person about to make a sacrifice. Its edge is completed by having the ends neatly turned back into a plait so the sides of the basket become double. The pawkho is an ornamental basket restrung on a cane plinth, standing four to six inches high, while the plait is ten inches in diameter.

The baitarupa is a large basket for storing rice in the house with a three feet square base and four feet high. The lining is plaited in a twilled pattern. The dapi is a flat tray for drying rice in the sun, the runner strengthened by two split bamboo hoops tied tightly together with loops of cane. The viakuarian is a sieve about two feet long, one and half feet wide and two inches high, used for cleaning rice. Very much like this is the baiba for sifting rice. It is a barrel-shaped lined basket used for storing clothes and valuables. It is one of the prettiest and elegantly made in barrel shape, and cherished highly as it is durable and used for keeping clothes and valuables. Its bottom is beautifully plaited and lined by split bamboo splits. The top and shoulder are ornamented with cane loop. A miniature version of this, exquisitely woven, is the bongtong, just six inches high, though used by women to keep silk. The hood of the basket is ornamentally attached to it by two fibres kept in position by six small loops, one underneath the centre, one on each side about half-an-inch be low the shoulder, one on each side of the cover, one in the centre on top. The ornamentation is formed by very narrow strips of cane.

The chenpapa is a small basket tied round the waist for holding the seeds of grain for planting. Then there are two large baskets rather roughly made, dawkia used by women and lauba by men for carry ing home things like vegetables, wood, water tubes, etc., from the woods or fields. Sanghri is a large flat piece of basketwork in which tobacco leaves are dried in the sun. It is four feet long and four feet wide. The awhben is a square basket used for carrying chickens, and is about fourteen inches square and twenty inches high with a latticed floor to allow the droppings to fall through. The hen and its brood are shut in it. A looped cane forms the handle to carry it around. Associated with it is the awhchari, a round basket used as a roosting plate for the chickens at night. A door made of a flat piece of wood is slipped between two vertical bamboos tied with cane, one on each side of the entrance and kept firmly in position by two pieces of bamboo, one each on top and bottom to allow the door to slip down. The chickens climb up the ladder to roost at night, and the

door is shut to be opened only in the morning. Hraben is an open basket, quite light, as it is used for carrying loads on a journey. It is made to any size with split bamboo.

A small open basket called bensara, made of a quarter-inch wide split bamboo and hung up near the hearth, has an interesting function to hold spoons. All sorts of household wares are also made, plates for eating, trays for holding drinks, etc., and have a dignity all their own. The scabbards for daos are made of finely woven cane with strings of dried monkey tails. The waterproof capes are ingeniously made from the midrib of leaflets. These overlap each other, resting as they do on strips of leaflet plaited in ply twists, reaching from shoulder to knee, laced crosswise together by a fibre thread. The top is fitted closely over the shoulders, tied in front by a thick fibre string. The suit is completed by a rain-hat formed by two circular pieces of bamboo lattice work, rising to a dome. It is fitted on to the head with fibre strings.

The Lakhers make only one kind of bamboo matting called aphi in a number of sizes upto ten feet by eight. Some of their most interesting handiworks are the cane bridges they construct called hleiri to span the large rivers, especially in the rains. The spot for construction is selected where there are suitable trees on either bank to which they are attached. The cane ropes tied together are flung across the water, and from these ropes cane hoops five feet high and four feet broad are hung at intervals of forty-seven inches, and tied on to the suspending ropes above. The floor, consisting of six long cane ropes, rests on the bottom of the hoof and is tied onto them with cane, each end of the cane forming the floor, being attached to a log of wood fixed between the trees or posts to form the uprights. The ropes are taken from the suspending canes and tied to trees to prevent the bridge from swaying too much. For small rivers, rough bridges called hleiden are built, made of two crossed posts at each end, over which four bamboos are run to make a pathway.

Women's pipes of clay are a speciality with Lakher women. All pottery work is done only by women who have to be either unmarried or widows, but pipes' bowls are made by all. The bowl is made in a special way.

From the hills thrown up by the termites, into which the women dig deep into, they take the lowest layer, which is darker in shade and supposed to be of a better consistency. When the clay has been kneaded to a desired consistency in a trough or on a flat stone, it is

rolled into a ball and left for three days wrapped up in leaves to set. Then the top of a paddy pestle is tied to one of the verandah posts, so that the post, the pestle and the floor form a triangle. Small holes are then bored into the pestle, about the height of a man's knee from the floor, soa s to admit a small wooden stick pointed at both ends called karolusong. The potter sits on the other side of the triangle holding a sharp edged piece of split bamboo in the right hand called thaipahniappa, and a stout bamboo piece a cubit long in the left. The potter's assistant takes a cubit of cotton string with a small stick tied to each end of it to afford a hand grip, and then twist it round the karolusong twice. Thus, by pulling the string first with one hand and then with the other, causes the karolusong carrying the clay to revolve. As it spins, he works the clay into shape with the thaipahni-apa, which is constantly wetted. When the bowl has acquired the right shape and smoothness, it is removed and hollowed out with the thaipahniapa, after which it is sun-dried and fired. The latter is done by placing the bowls close together on branches of dry chestnut wood, over which are piled dry leaves in a heap, set alight from the top. When the bowls are taken out hot, rice water is poured onto them to render them less brittle.

Another intriguing handiwork which the Lakhers excel in is mak-ing knots with string and rope, made generally out of the bark of a tree. There are a large variety of them. Here are a few:

The seicheri chakhi is called the fisherman's knot. It is used for tying short bits of cane or bark rope together to make a long one for tying up the mithun.

The poto is a double sheet bend used for joining cane or bark ropes. The chakhi iapi is known as the tomfool knot, for it can be easily untied and is, therefore, used for temporary knotting only. The raizerurichakhi is the reef knot. Apart from using it for tying cane and bark ropes, this is used in tying bamboo and wood. The richakhi is only a half knot for keeping just two strings temporarily together. The chakhi is a loop used for tying a bowstring to a stave, cane to posts for hanging clothes to dry, for setting rat traps, and a variety of other purposes. The heibraw is the noose used chiefly to set snares to trap birds and beasts. In case of the latter, it is slipped under the animal's foot and pulled tightly. It is also put around the neck of a domestic animal to lead it.

The cheisiaripasi is a knot used for tying the cane string of a pellet bow, and the bow used for flicking raw cotton.

The angasaripasi knot is popularly known as the cat's paw, used for tying down bamboos on top of the roof of a house.

The chahren is used for tying together bamboos or other things to enable them to be carried easily and conveniently. For this, bamboo slats are wound twice or thrice round the objects to be tied together, the ends of these slats held together and twisted round until they form a knot. They are then tucked in under the folds around the objects tied together to prevent the knot from becoming undone.

HUNTING

Like all hill tribes, the Lakhers are keen hunters. Bows, arrows and spears have long been replaced by guns. Normally, it is customary for each village to appoint a man called Sapahleisapa to sacrifice a cock to ensure good hunting. For, he has to be in ceremonial parlance, "pure." This appointment is made annually, but if a man proves efficacious, his term is renewed.

Only a red cock may be sacrificed outside the village fence, for animals are said to have a preference for them. The day of the sacrifice imposes abstinence from work on the following two days for the whole village. This applies especially to spinning and weaving, for animals are said to fear cotton and will not enter a village on seeing it because spinning and weaving and therefore, cotton are said to be linked with women, associated in the minds of animals with blood

There are interesting customs attached to the distribution of the kill. The killer's principal friend gets the neck; next friend the ribs; the maternal uncle the chest; the sister-in-law the loins; her husband the meat round the tail (this is expected to be repaid when the latter hunts); his own sister receives the hind legs. When relations are too numerous, they are given by turn. When the hunter fails to give meat to women entitled to it, they claim compensation from him called hmiatla. It is believed that success means hunting of the larger beasts, and by performing the ia sacrifice, a Lakher can reach paradise. For the large animal, a special sacrifice called salupakia is performed. It is believed to give the performer the power in the next life over the spirit of the animal he has killed. This sacrifice in the shape of a fowl or pig is made immediately after the hunt, the killer intoning a hunting song while perfoming it. If it is a fowl, women may not eat it. If a pig, any part except the head may be eaten. During the period of the sacrifice also, the members of the household are prevented

from doing any work. The belief is that on the night of this ceremony, the spirit of the animal killed comes to watch the killer.

The Lakhers have a superstition about tigers. It has the power to cause sickness or ill luck. Therefore, when a tiger has been killed, a special ceremony called chakei ia is performed where laughter is forbidden. The tiger's head is then brought into the village and kept in front of the killer's house – it is never taken in. A curious ceremony then follows. The hunter dresses up in a woman's clothes with a spindle and thread in his hand and smoking a woman's pipe. He dances round the head winding the thread, finally driving the spindle through the tiger's nostrils. The head is then picked up by one of the assistants who runs through the village with it followed by the hunter. The head is thrown away outside the village. This strange custom is explained by a story. Once a woman, while going to a field, was knocked down by a tiger. However, a spindle she was carrying entered the tiger's nostrils and killed him, and she escaped. Since then, it is a custom to perform the ia ceremony wearing a woman's costume. The dead tiger's brother is supposed to watch the proceedings from a height. And if he finds a woman dancing, he does not get angry, for his brother got killed by a mere woman and he had only himself to blame. So he quietly goes away.

Apart from the use of the gun, many ingenious traps are set for snaring and trapping birds and animals. For catching monkeys, for instance, two kinds of traps are used called azenbatla. The first consists of two forked uprights across which a bamboo is placed with bananas or maize tied in the middle. The bamboo cross-piece is sawn through half where the bait is attached. When a monkey swarms up one of the uprights and runs along the cross-piece to seize the bait, the cross-piece breaks, while monkey is hurled on to the bamboo stakes planted below. The second is made out of a single bamboo planted at a slant with a bait dangling from its end. The bamboo is sawn through half in the middle, and when the monkey runs up to take the bait, the bamboo breaks and drops on to the spikes below.

For catching bears and tigers, a trap called ventla is used. A forked rest, consisting of two poles tied together at the top, is erected and a log placed over it. Two beams are suspended from it, one end of each beam resting on the ground, while the other slung by cane ropes from the top end of the log, balanced on the fork. Across these two beams, a platform is laid and the ground below is sown with sharp bamboo stakes and the bait is laid on the platform. A rope attached to the

end of the log balanced on the fork is tied round a piece of stock or bamboo, slipped below the two beams as to just hold the trap in position, and the end of this same piece of rope is tied round the bait. When the animal mounts the platform to snatch the bait, it draws out the peg holding the trap in position. The platform collapses as the log holding the beams falls, while the animal is deposited on the stakes below.

The trap used for the tiger is called meithei kapu, which is more elaborate, with the gun set up on bamboo-rests and pointed along a path habitually used by a tiger. A fine cord, made out of the hair-like fibres from the Sasai palm, is attached to a post planted on the opposite side of the path. This cord is then so run across the path that any animal coming along the path strikes it. The other end of the cord is taken round the back of the frame and tied to the two ends of a small piece of stick placed against the trigger, so that when an animal knocks against the cord, the stick presses and explodes the gun.

A popular trap employed to catch the larger kinds of game is the kapu. For this, a small fence is erected along the spur of a hill or anywhere in the jungle where animals are on the move. A spear is stuck horizontally at each of the passages left at intervals in the fence at a height sufficient to pierce the vital part of any animal that would pass. The spear is held back behind the fence by a strong bamboo spring, held in position by a peg in a cane ring. Across the gap in the fence, a creeper is run to make an animal trip over it to release the spring and force the spear forward to pierce the animal that tries to pass through the gap. The same kind of trap, though smaller, is used for catching the porcupine.

Sari is the trap used for catching the barking deer. The deer are guided along the path by the fence in which gaps are made to enable them to pass through. In each gap a hole of one and half feet is made in the ground, which is then covered with bamboo sticks. On the top of it, a noose made out of palm fibre is placed and attached to a creeper tied to a springy sapling. This trap is covered with soil and leaves, while a piece of wood placed along each side of the hole to ensure that the animal will place its foot on the desired spot. For, in order to avoid the two pieces of wood, the animal will step between them. The cane rope is tightened then to bend the sapling held down by a bamboo peg kept in place by the bamboo sticks covering the hole. When these collapse and release the bamboo peg holding down the

cane rope, the sapling flies backwards leaving the, noose tight round the animal's legs.

An elaborate trap, the makhen, is used for snaring a wide range of animals and birds, from rats to porcupines. A long low fence, measuring even a mile, is run across a jungle with gaps for animals to go through. Over each gap, a log of wood is erected and held in position by a smaller log above it, one end of which rests on a forked pole and is attached to the log below by a strand of zongvanpa. While from the other end, a similar rope runs down attached to a small stick held by a bar running along one side of the trap and by the pressure of a stick across the gap, held by other sticks under which lies the bait. When an animal enters through, it pushes aside the sticks holding the rope maintaining the equilibrium. The top log flies up bringing the heavy log down, crushing the animal.

For catching small animals, like rats, squirrels, etc, a small trap called leika is used. A small bamboo-fence is erected in the jungle with gaps filled with loops for snares. These are tied on to whippy sticks bent over and kept steady by the pressure of a peg whose one end rests against the top of the hoop, the other against a cross-stick resting against the sides of the hoop's arch. This stick is tied to another small one laid in the gap on the ground, and held in place by another stick laid over it lightly held by a peg in the ground. The animal running through moves the sticks, releasing the peg resting against the hoop, the bent stick flies back and the noose is pulled round the animal.

For catching pheasants and partridges on the ground, piva is used. For this, a sapling is firmly planted on the ground, and a cane-string with a noose at the end is tied at the top of the sapling. Below, four bamboo pegs are placed in the ground just far enough to allow their being encircled by the noose. The peg below the cane-string has a small projection to support a large piece of split bamboo bent in the middle, and has both ends touching the ground. The slip knot for the noose is made just under the centre of this bent placed in it. When the pheasant pecks at it, the receptacle falls releasing the slip knot holding the sapling which flies back, and the noose catches the bird's neck.

A bird trap, operating on a different principle, is the aphen. It consists of a platform, a foot square, made of bamboo matting and wood, and raised so as to fall and kill the prey. A forked post is planted on the ground and a stick placed on it with one end projecting

from the platform. From the other end of the top stick, a bark rope is looped round the stick attached to the mat platform. Another rope with a stick attached is lowered from it a few inches above the ground. Split bamboo pieces in a wheel-shape are arranged on this, one end of each resting on the stick tied to the cane rope, while the other on the ground. Grain is scattered under the spokes, and when birds alight on these spokes to pick, they displace them and upset the balance. Thus, the stick tied to the end of the cane rope is released, the cross-stick running over the forked post flies upwards, and the mat platform weighted with the stone falls and kills the bird.

Rituals

Among the spirits to be propitiated, the Lakhers have a special one called zang, who is the individual's guardian angel, very distinct from the ghost, and stays in close proximity with the person. When the zang is pleased, it bestows on the person attached to health, wealth, happiness and children, as also offers protection from accidents. So rituals are performed to please the zang. The sex of the zang is determined by the sex of the person it is attached to.

The zang is not expected to cause any harm but, if displeased, will hand over the person to the Leurahripas, evil spirits living in the mountains or deep pools.

Khazangappa is the supreme deity of the Lakhers. There are certain articles dedicated to him called anahmang which literally means the "forbidden things." For this deity alone is the anahmang used.

Birth

The birth of a child and the following days are full of ceremonials amongst the Lakhers. If the labour is prolonged and difficult, a woman who delivered with ease is called in. She hands the expectant mother a boiled egg to eat, saying: "May you give birth to your child as easily I did." After the child arrives, an aoh is observed for nine days for a girl and ten for a boy. *Aoh* means resting, and is observed on certain occasions such as death in childbirth, accidents, etc., when no work is done and strangers stopped from entering the village by erecting branches with leaves on the path to indicate aoh. During this period, the mother must not leave the house, and when the father goes off for work, he makes a bamboo pin, places it in the

baby's hand saying: "You must not follow me to the place where I am going to work." This is supposed to prevent the child's soul from following the parent which may jeopardize its life.

For the first three days, the child is not taken outside the house. On the fourth day, it is taken out with a hoe for luck and a small pot containing cooked rice. The child's ears are also pierced on this day with a lemon tree thorn or a porcupine quill, and some soldered ear-rings of cotton thread are placed in the ears.

The ceremony for the termination of the aoh for the girl takes place on the ninth day. For this, either the father or mother stands on the spot where the birth took place, while the other parent goes under the house with a small leaf-basket held together with a cotton thread. Two pebbles from beneath the house are placed in the basket, the thread is passed through the floor to the parent inside the house who pulls it up and places it on the birth place. A fowl is then sacrificed on this spot, the cooked meat is placed inside the basket with two pebbles and fixed with a bamboo peg into the wall. The explanation for this is that when the baby was born its soul fell on the floor, and may suffer if it remained on the ground below. Now the baby's soul can enter the basket, and as the stones are heavy and strong, the baby too acquires the capacity to do hard work. The thread with which the basket is hauled represents the carrying band which women carry their loads with.

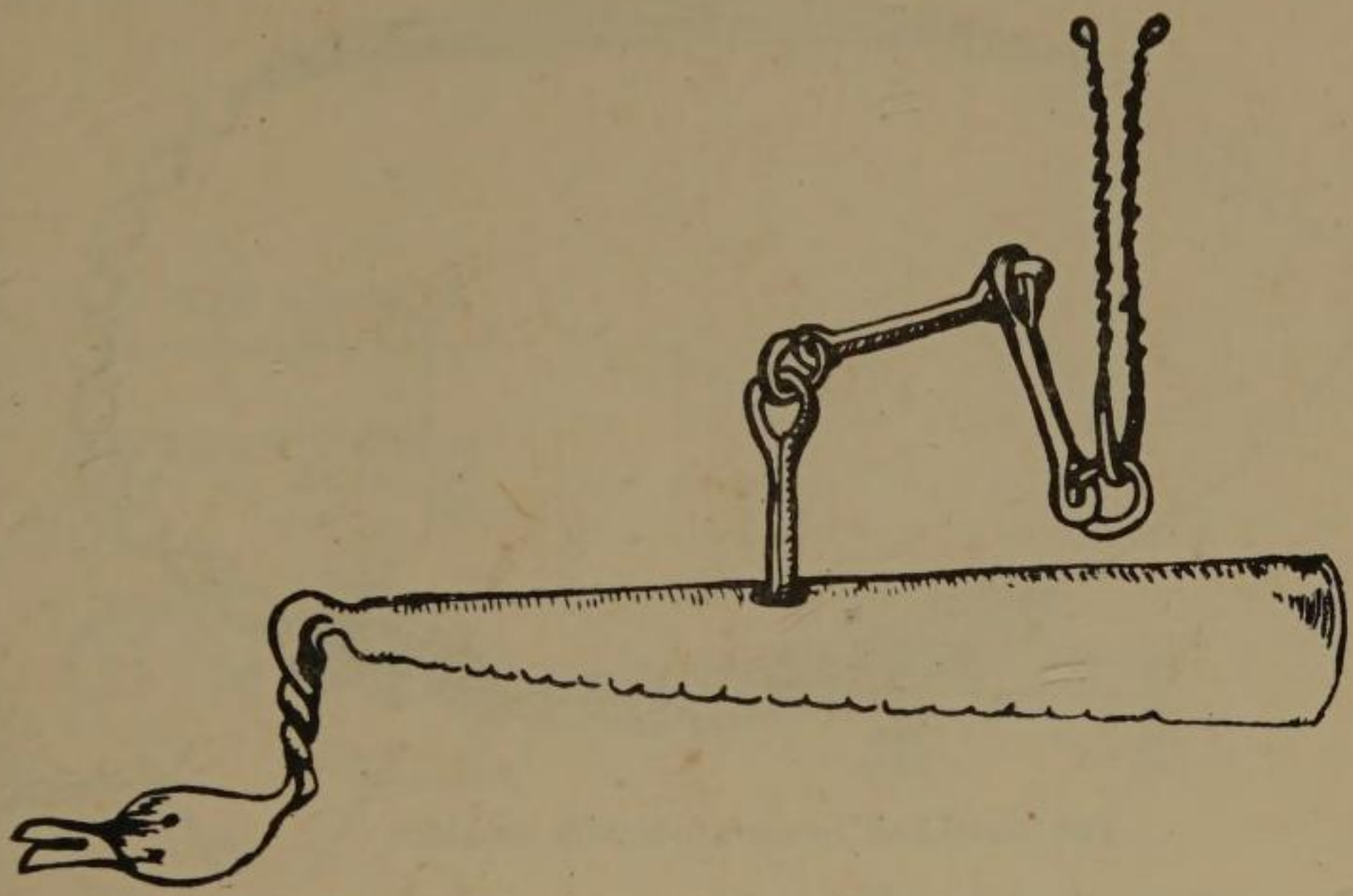
For a boy, the father makes a bow and arrow on the tenth day, lays on the ground just below the spot the child had been born. The mother pulls this up with a cotton thread to place it on the place of birth. The idea is the same, to bring up the baby's soul if it had dropped below. The fowl is sacrificed over the bow and arrow. In every sacrifice, certain parts of the animal are dedicated to the spirit it is offered. These are set aside and are known as phavaw. Here the phavaw are rubbed over the bow, and the bow and arrow then tied to the wall above where the birth had taken place. The bow and arrow symbolize the success in game and war. And it is hoped that by bringing the child early into contact with them, it will grow up into a successful wielder of this weapon. The baby's hair is also cut, a custom which is kept until the child becomes eight or nine. Later, he starts growing the hair long until it can be tied into a bun. The last time the hair is cut is a ceremonial called sarang. On this day, the child is given its name.

Every Lakher child is given two names, as the belief is that if a

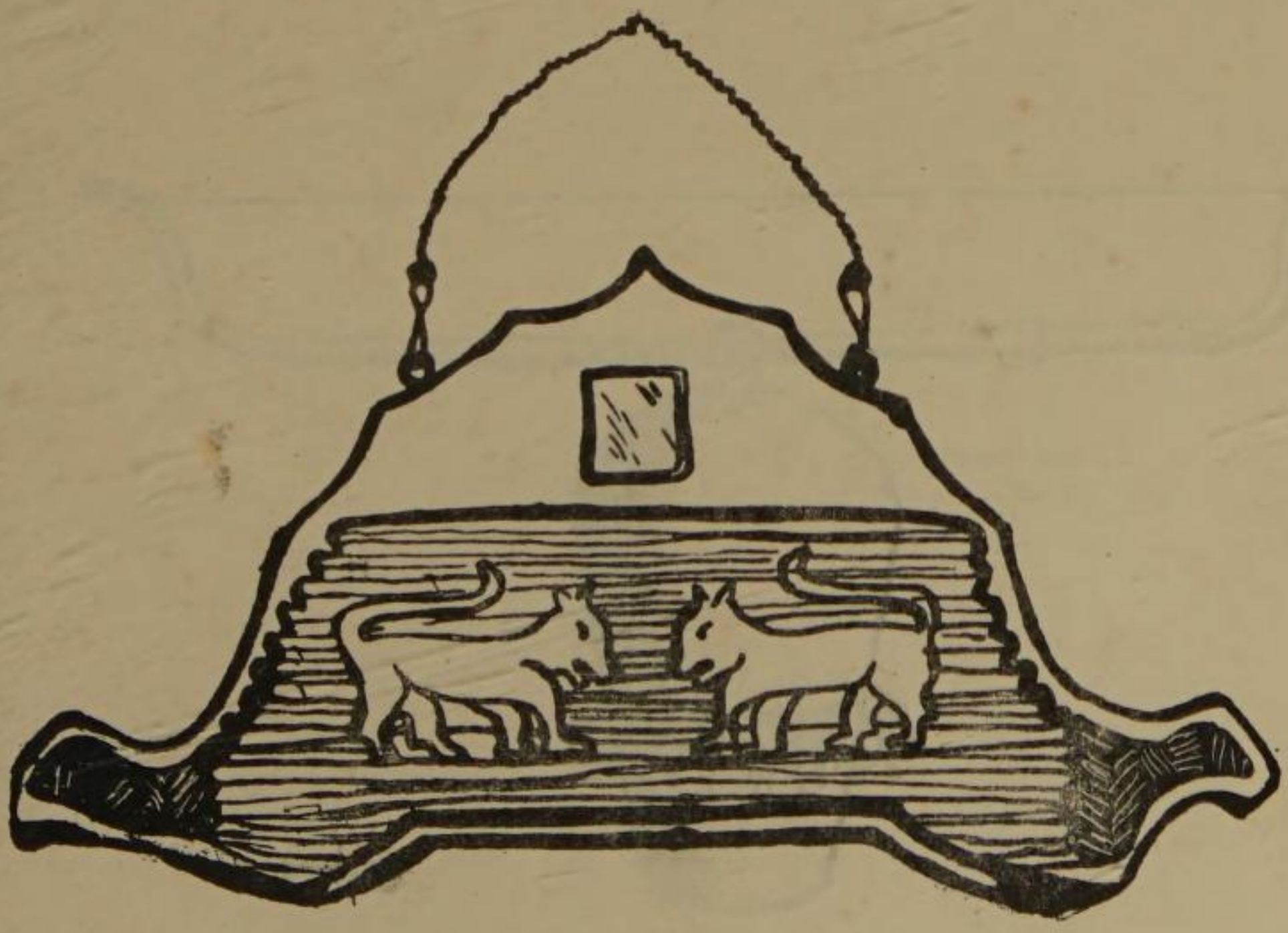
person has only one name, the God Khazangpa may forget it and not take care of the person. At the rituals, both the names are uttered. But in daily practice, only one name is used when a person is asked for his or her name. Just the first name is given.

The names given are generally of wise, great and famous people, noted warriors or hunters, in the hope that the child will acquire the outstanding qualities of its namesake. The name of a living person is never given, no matter how near or dear the person may be. Strangely enough, it is considered an insult, and the person given the name may even be fined. But children can be named after ancestors. A child born with particularly long hair may be called *sarang*, long haired, or the offspring of very poor parents may be named Leipo, "everything lost." An expert blacksmith's daughter has been called Dawku, meaning skilful in metal work. A man successful in hunting called his son Tevo, which meant the father had been successful. A rich man called his son Ngongkong, "hoard of silver." The Lakhers like to call their daughters after flowers.

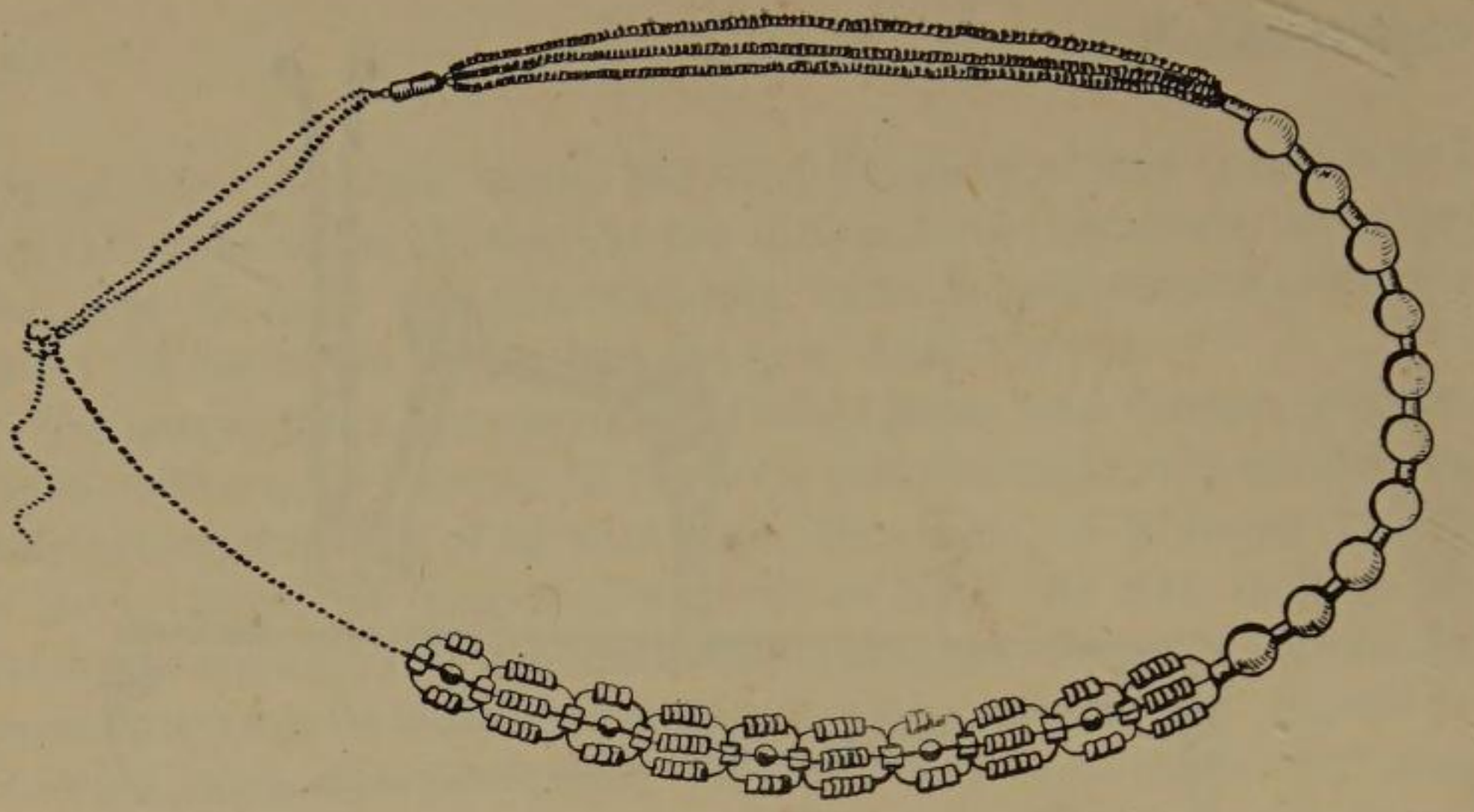
A picturesque ritual amongst the Lakhers is the making of offerings to the sky and the hills, performed for trifling illnesses. For this, a model house is made and fixed on to the roof of the house above the doorway. Inside this model house, flour and raw cotton are placed and cotton threads dropped from the model house into the doorway of the house right through the main post at the back to which they are tied. A fowl is taken up to the roof, some of its feathers pulled out and placed in the model house. After this, the fowl is sacrificed on the roof and its phavaw placed in the model house. Immediately after the fowl is killed, the slayer ties some blunt-headed arrows with feathers from the bird killed, and fires one at the sky, one towards the hills, in fact, whatever direction they think the sick man's soul may be wandering in order to call it back. The ceremony ends when the sacrificer goes down into the house where the meat is cooked and eaten. The expectation is that the sick man's soul will follow the arrow on its flight and then return home. The little house on the roof is for the purpose of receiving the soul while it comes down from the sky, in case it has been detained. After a short rest, the soul climbs down the cotton threads into the house and restored to its owner.



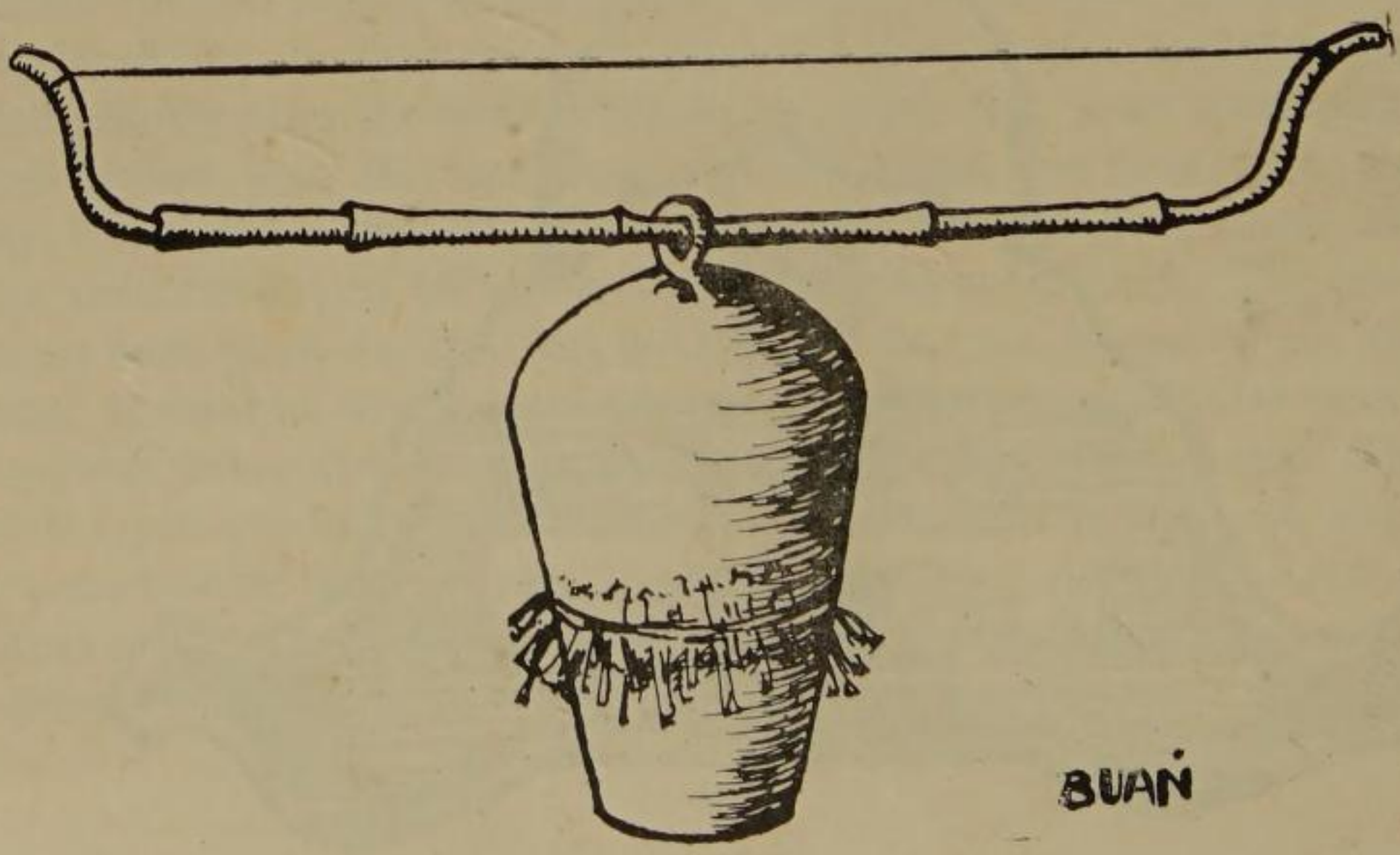
An Iron Kekreng



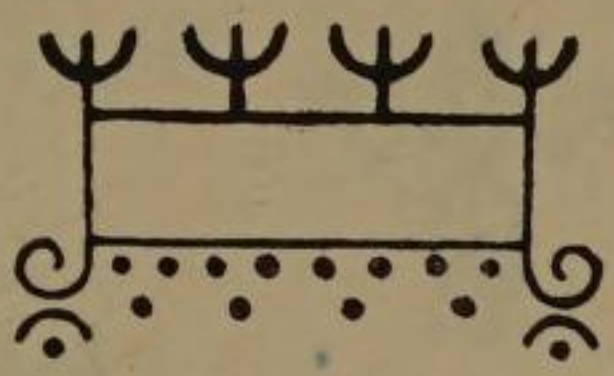
Wooden horse, attendant on Hunga and Hirme, Gods of the Tati clan,
at the bison-horn Moria village of Tikampal

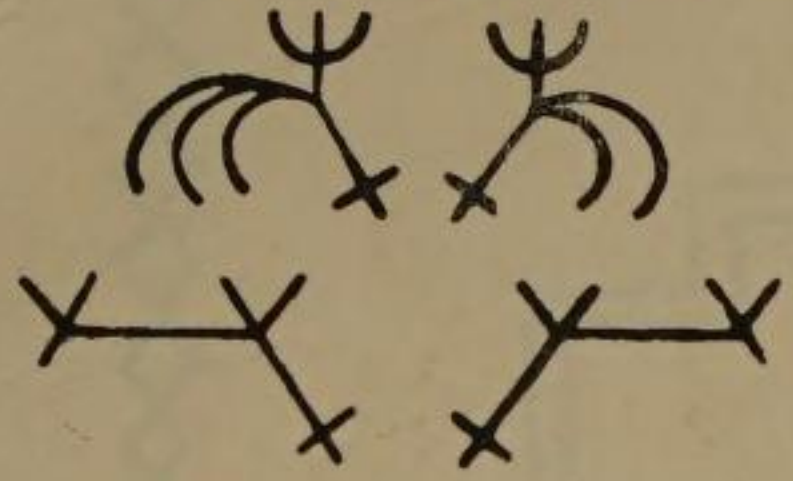


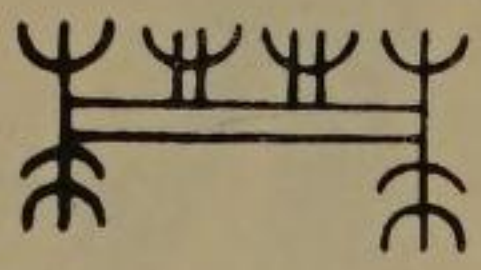
The 'pusal koji' or cat's footprint necklace

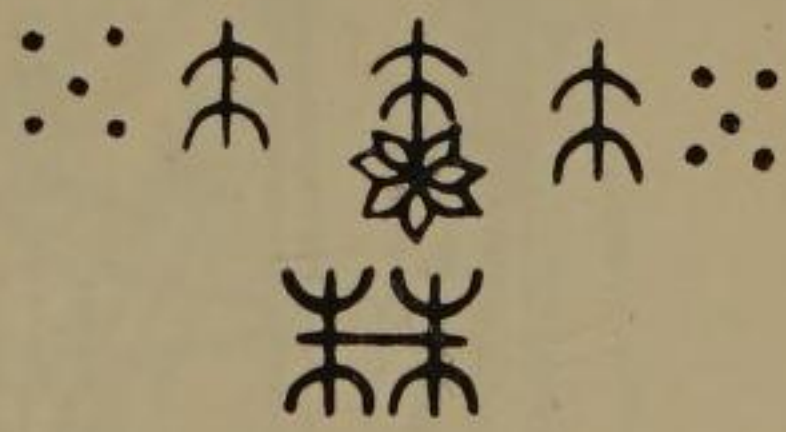


Brass 'Orki' used for ladling liquor

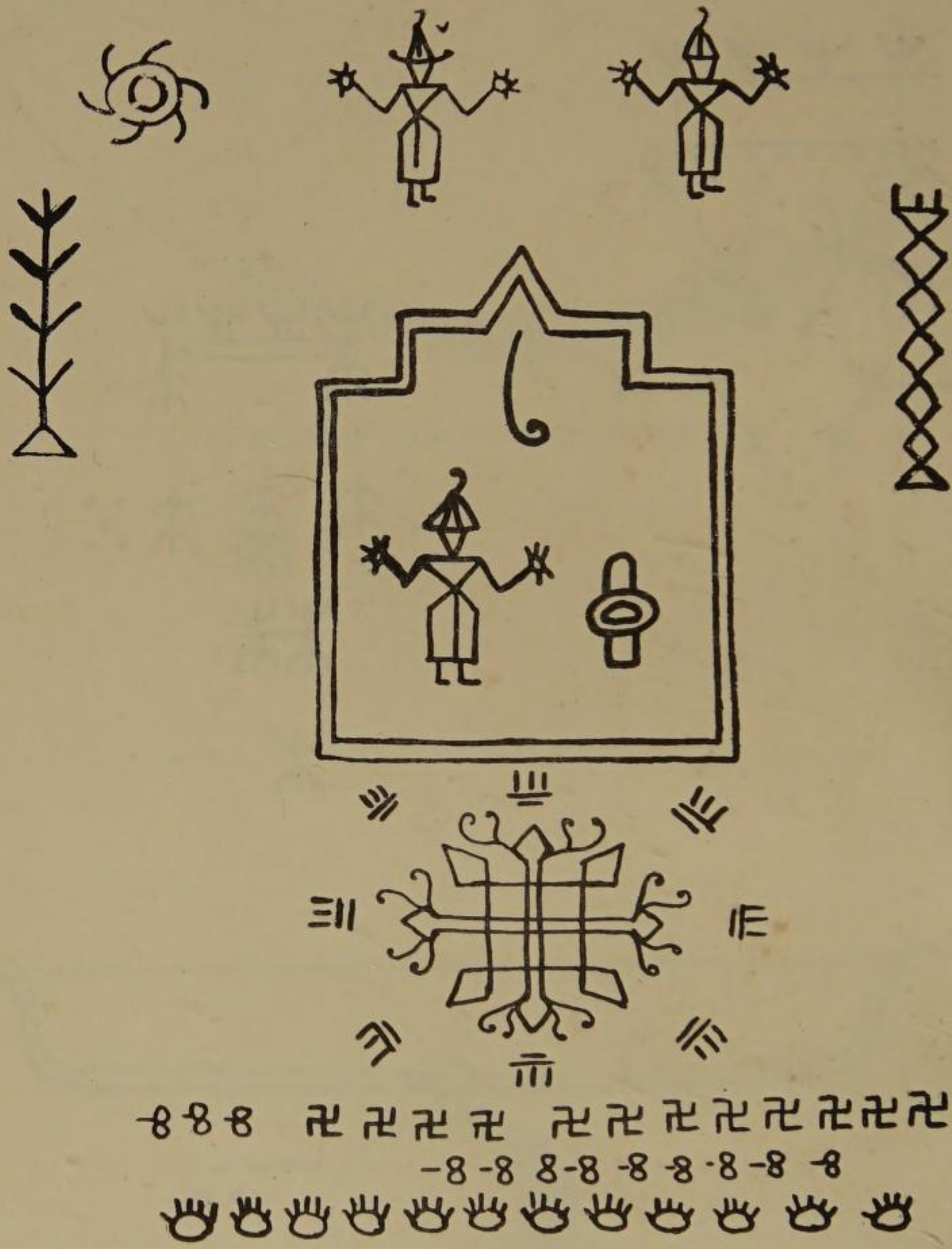






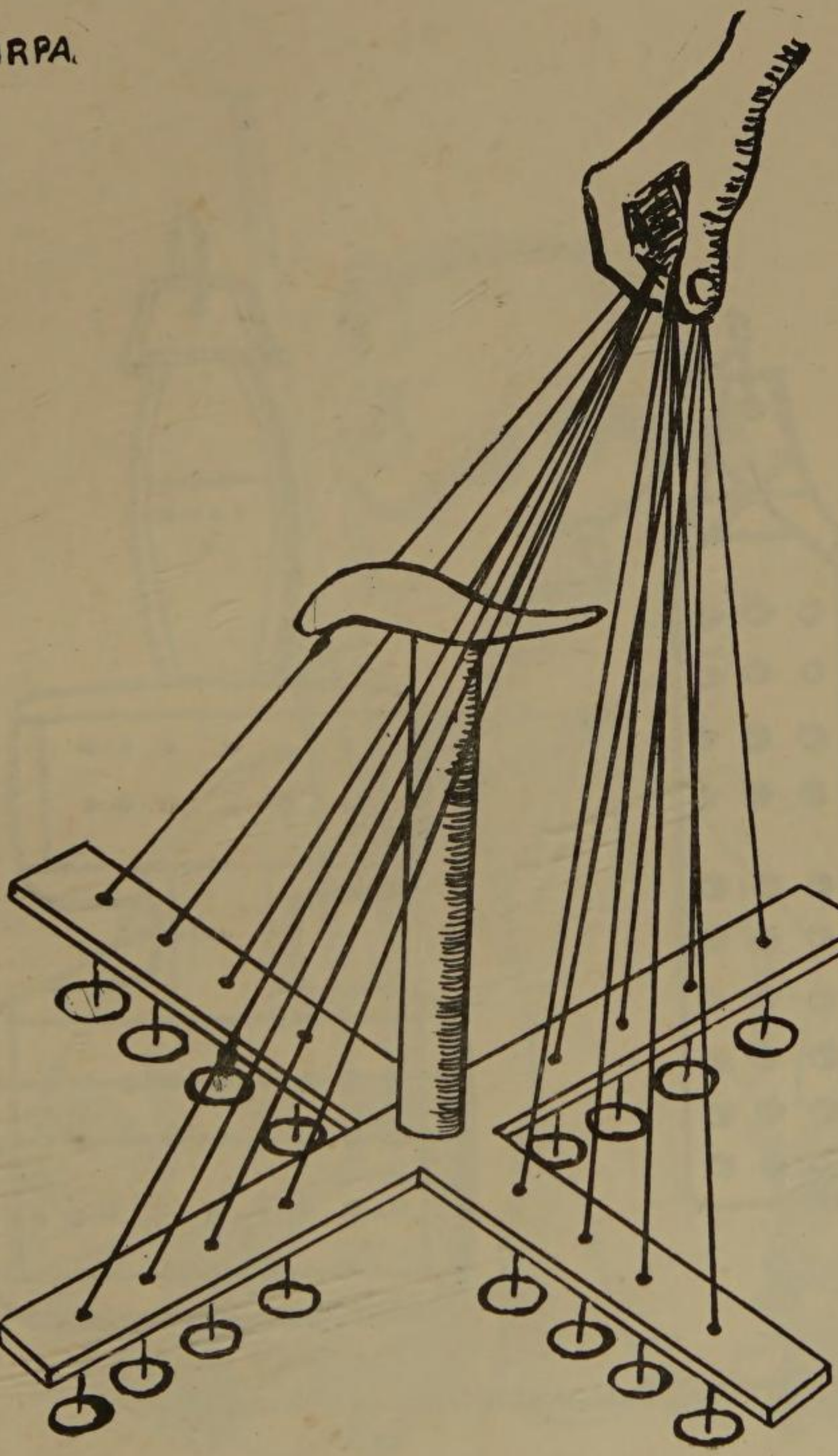


Tattoo marks on the body of tribal women

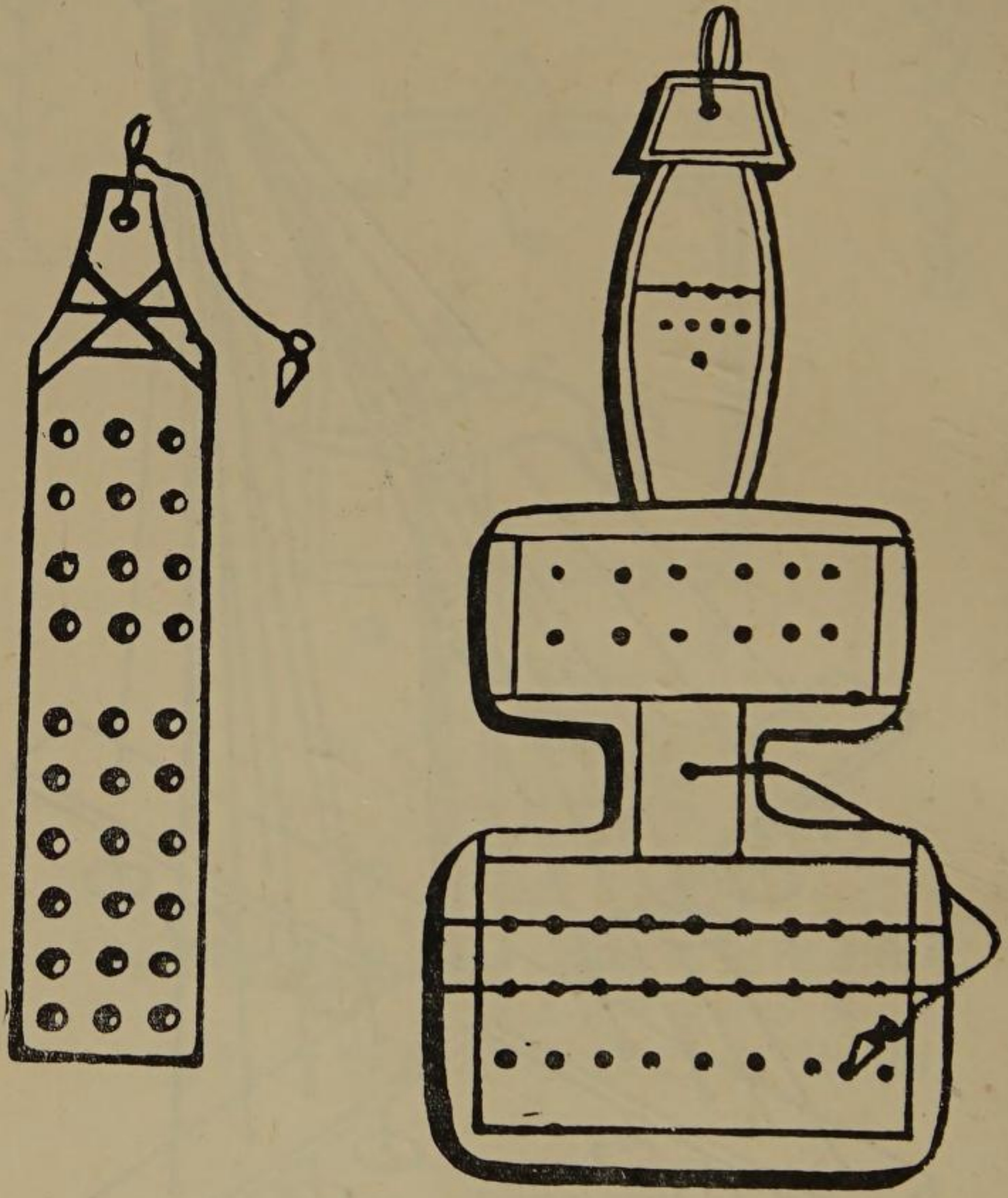


Wall decoration, made for child's ceremony—
The *Kol* tribe of central India

SARPA.

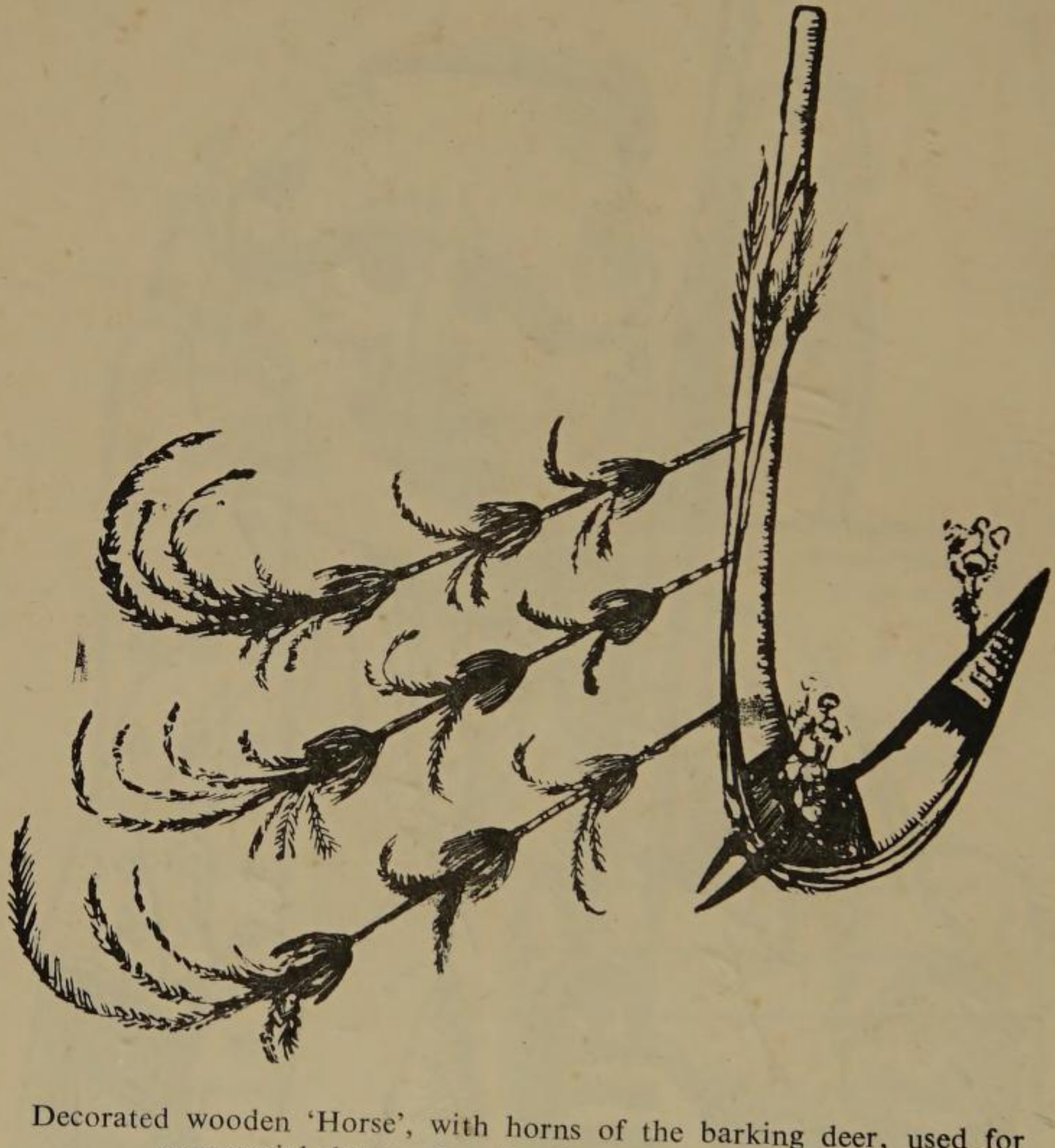


A mask

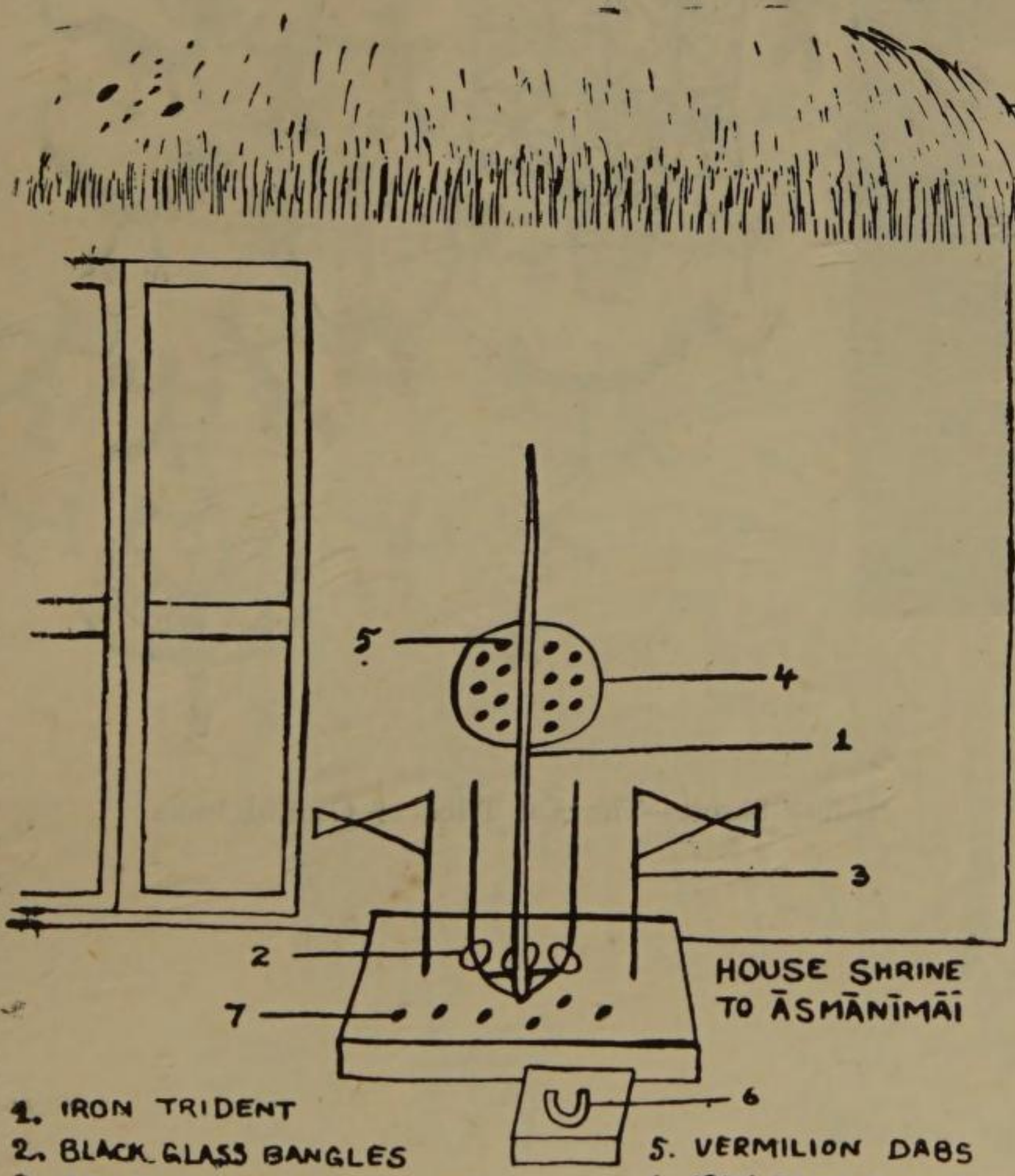


Musical Instruments (Percussion)

A Tribal calender

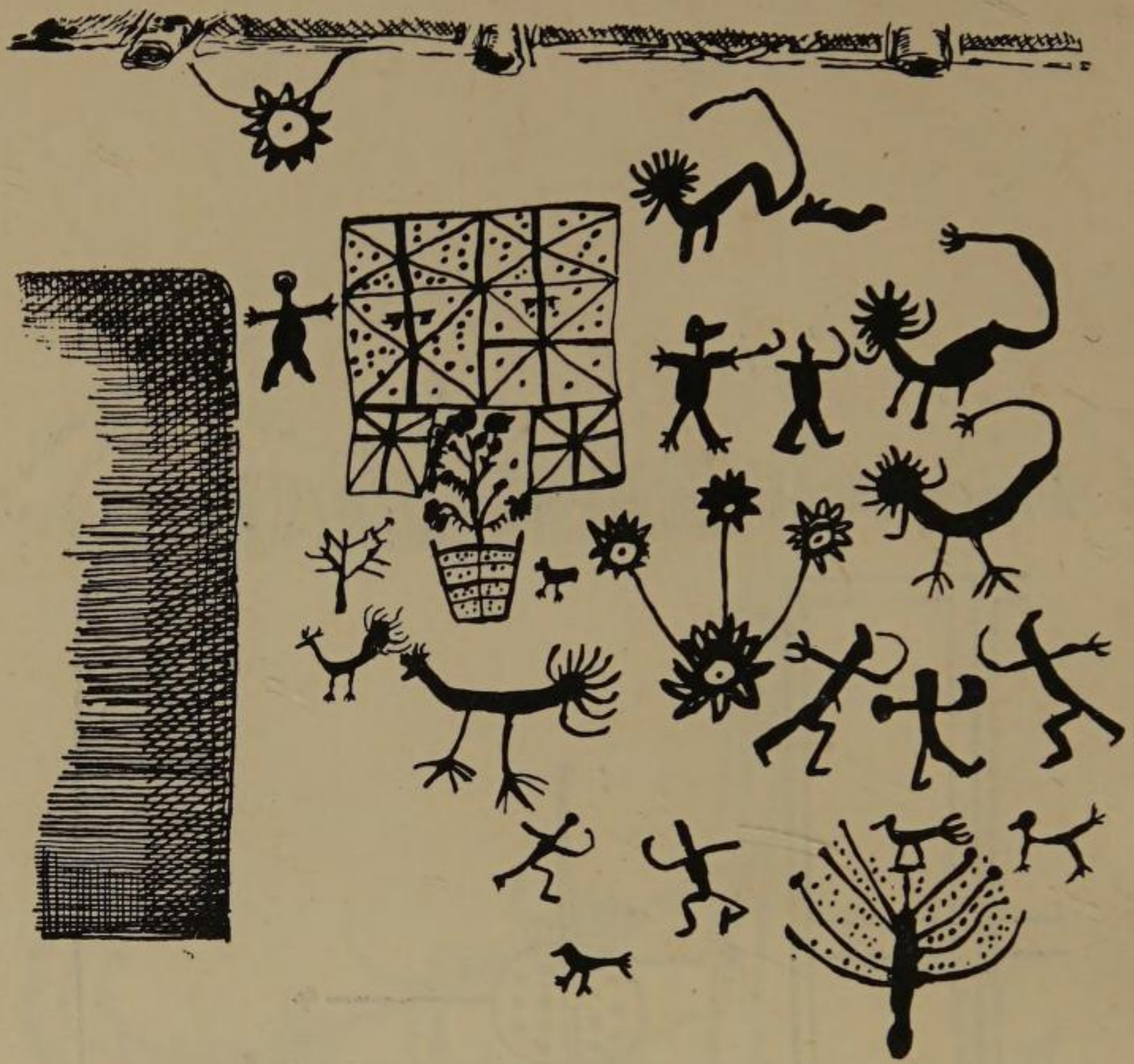


Decorated wooden 'Horse', with horns of the barking deer, used for ceremonial dances (length of wooden section 3″ 4″)

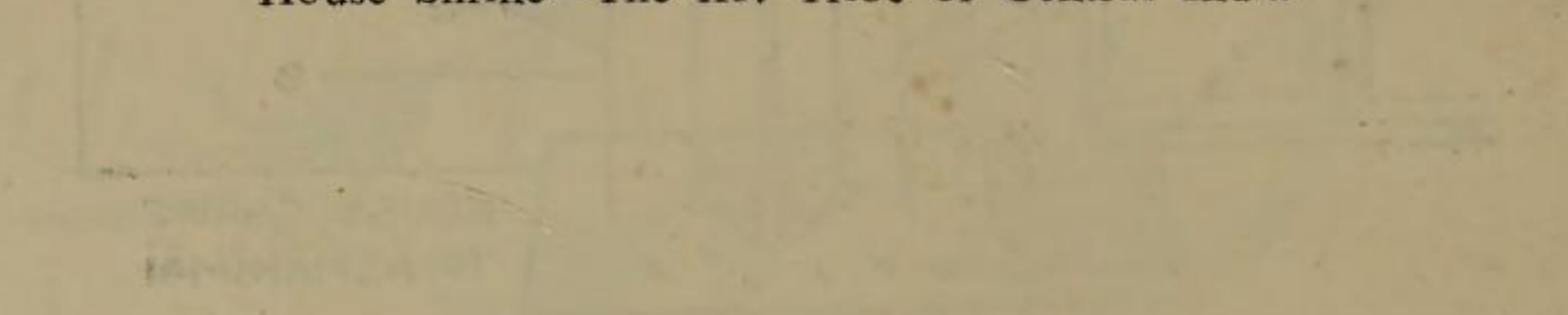


Wall Decoration on a *Kol* House

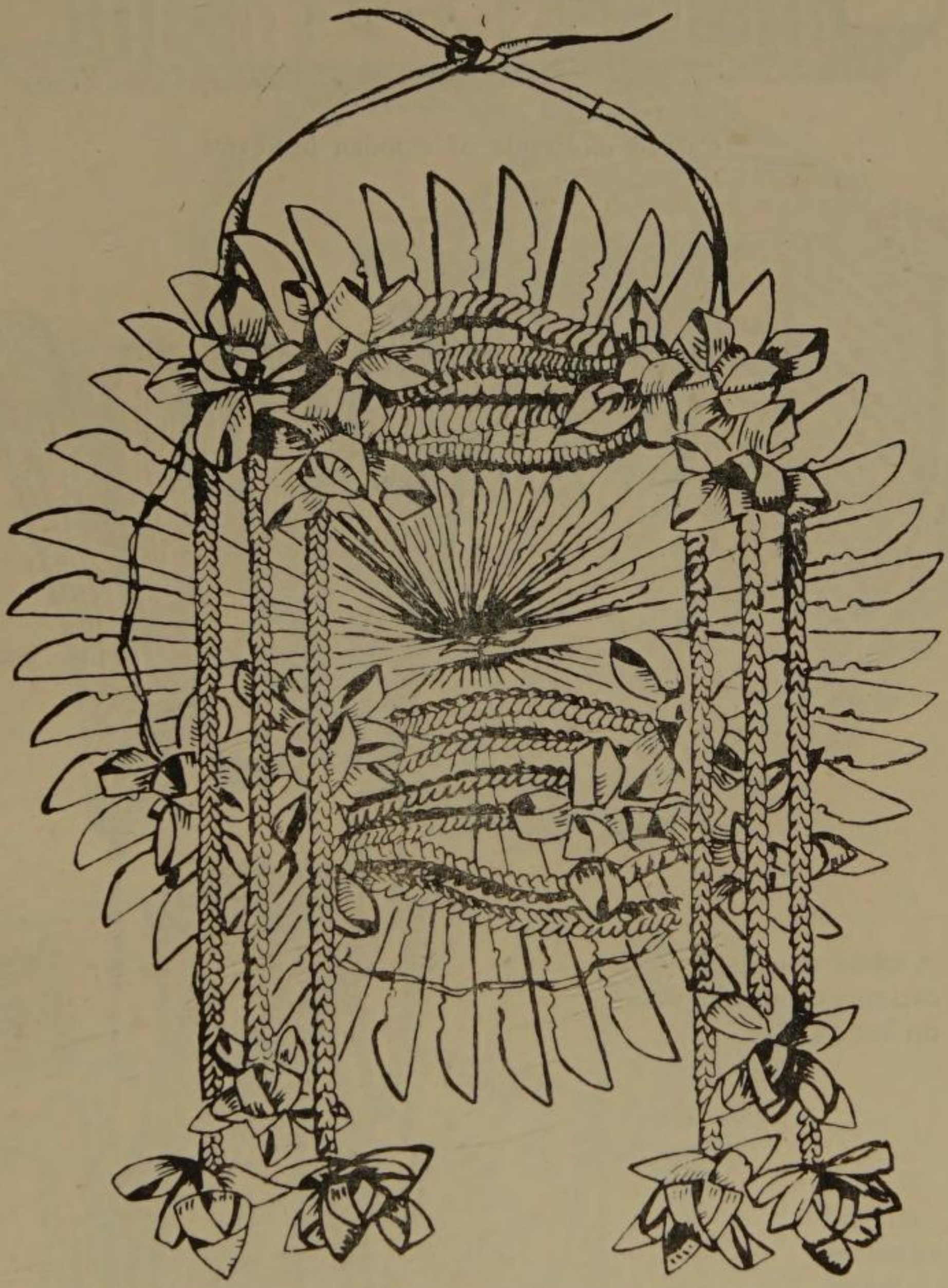
The Figures represent a house, sunflower, men, tigers, peacocks, birds, flowers, and trees, Dwelling place of a Devi is at the lower right-hand corner. The kol tribe of Central India



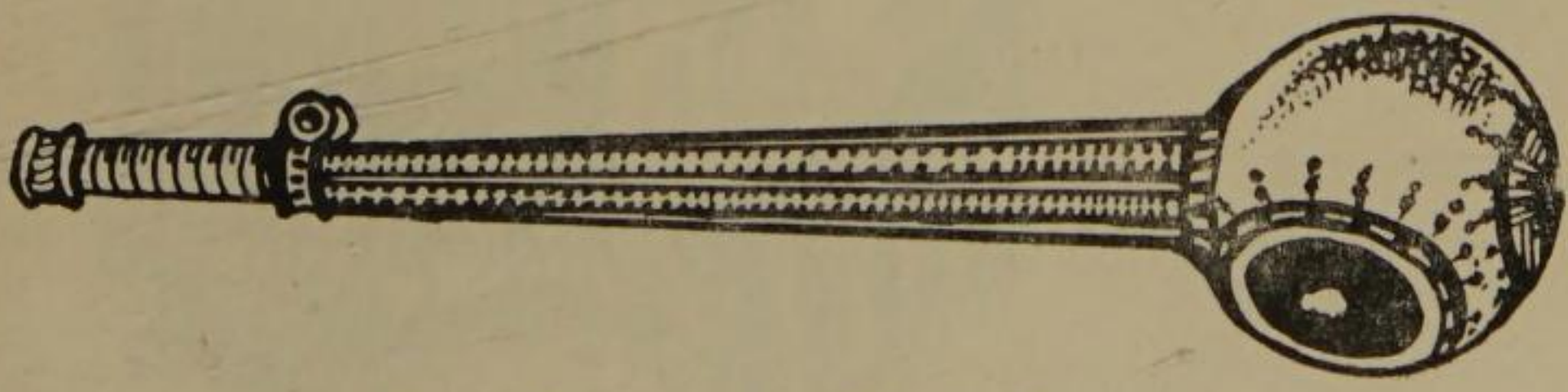
House Shrine—The *Kol* Tribe of Central India



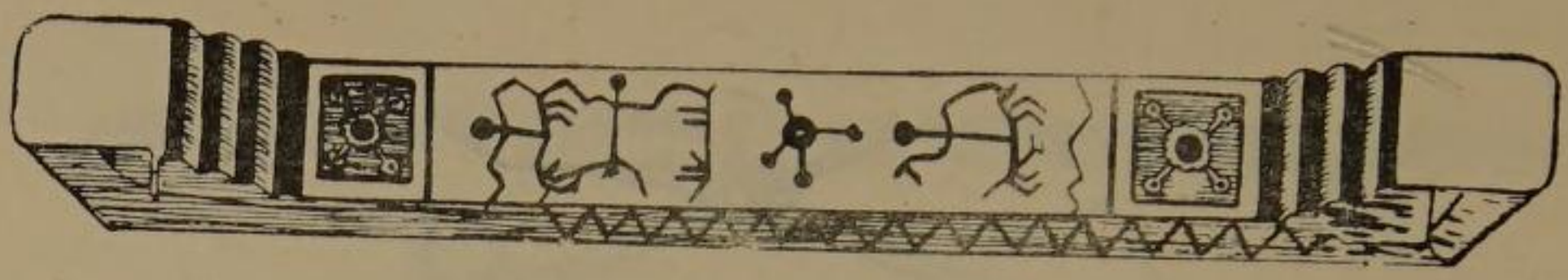
A gong



Marriage Crown for the bridegroom made of date-palm leaves



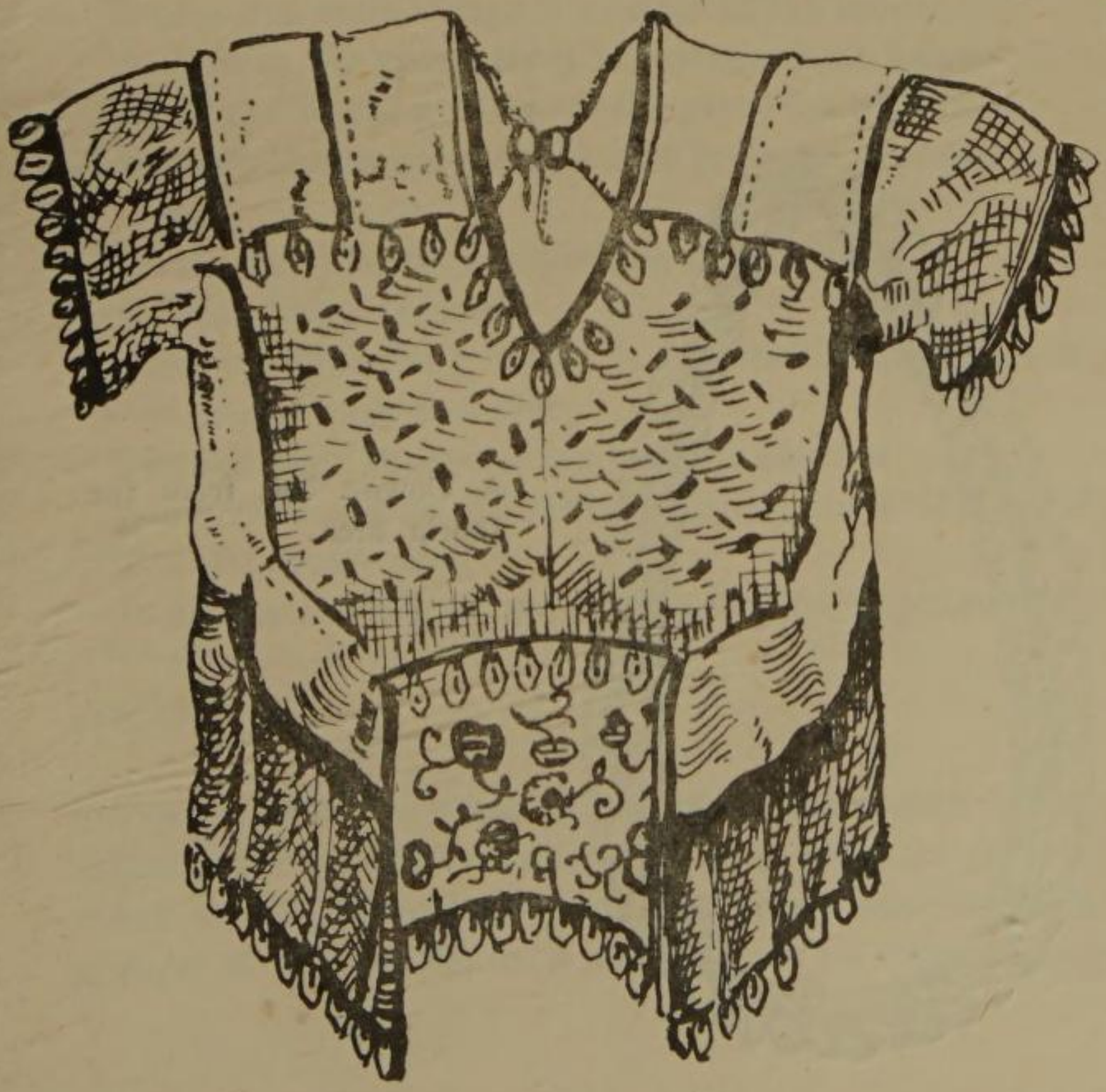
Musical Instrument used by the Santhals



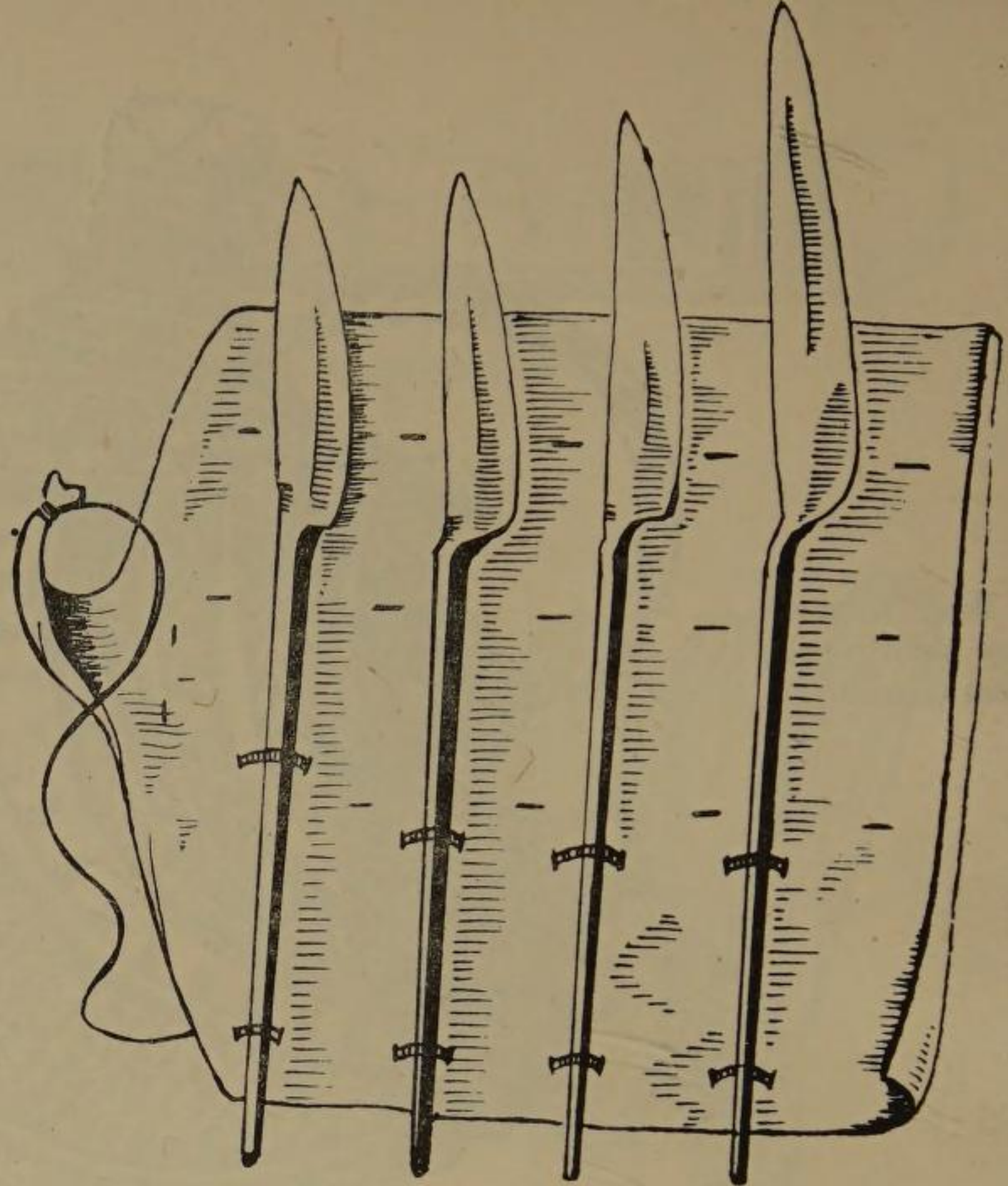
Carved underside of wooden head-rest

A tribal woman
carrying chunks of wood
on her back

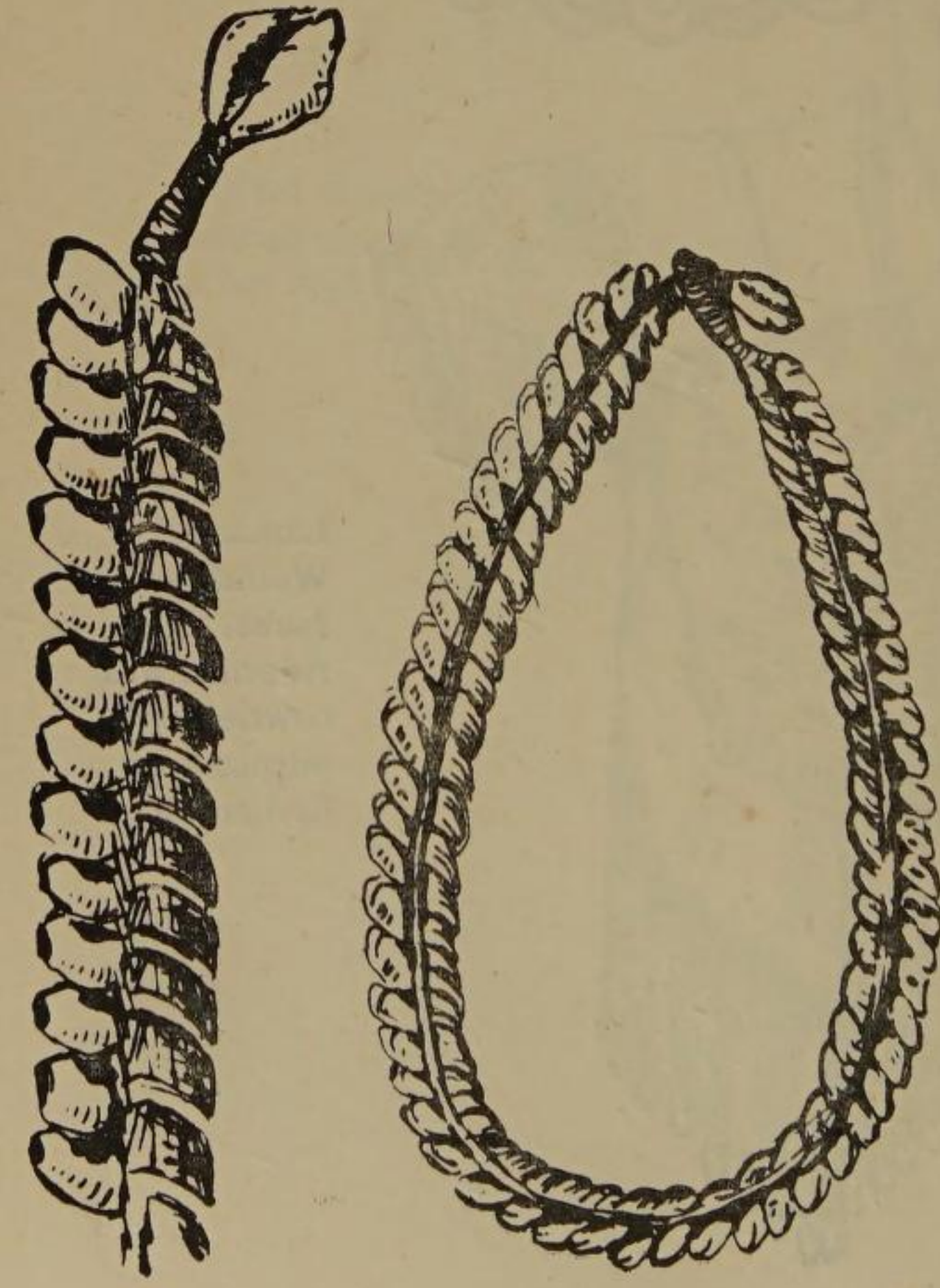
A Brass Tobacco-Box made by the local Ghazia



Lamane Woman's Jacket Adorned with cowries for purposes of devination



Set of cock-fighting knives in cloth bag length of longest knife 3″



A Cowrie belt from the Jhoria area

Chapter Two

Tribalism in India

16 The Gonds of Madhya Pradesh

Folk Song of the Gonds

To me this little village is as dear as the moon
And from the great city it has dragged me away.
In all the world a village is the place for happiness,
In every house are ploughs and bullocks, and everyone goes farming,
When the villagers are working in the fields
It looks like a festival.
After the ploughing the fields are thick with mud, but the women dance as they sow rice,
Friends play, throwing mud at one another
Some are smoking, some chewing pan, some who are idle sit gaping, while others sing.
In all the world a village is the place for happiness.

History

Geographically, no other tribe is so widely spread out as the Gonds, extending from the Godavari in the south to the Vindhyas in the north. In fact, it would be more correct to describe them as various groups of Gonds, for each has acquired its own language and mode

of life. The eastern Gonds in Madhya Pradesh area speak the local Chattisgarhi dialect, while those in the south Hyderabad speak Telugu and are better known as Koyas. Their own original language is Gondi.

What had distinguished the Gonds was not merely their vast numbers, by far the largest tribal group, but also because of the political power they wielded over a kingdom with fifty-two garhs, the dynasties through which they continued to rule before they succumbed to the Moghul, and later, Maratta military assaults. Thus, even in the recent historical period they seem to have contended with both Hindu and Muslim regimes, and figure in the chronicles of that period. From this firm source we know there was a Gond dynasty ruling in Garha. The Muslim writers have described these territories as Gondwana with the Maharaja exercising control over a number of petty chiefs, and administering areas covering the Satpura plateau to the Narmada valley to the south which now comprises the districts of Jubbulpore, Mandla, Seoni, Balaghant, Chindwara, Betul, etc. Around 1564 A.D., a Moghul general laid it low, and we have the heroic tale of the queen regent who died fighting. As the Moguhl rule declined in these far-flung regions, the *de facto* political power seems to have reverted to the Gond Rajas, with a nominal recognition of the old sovereignty. The real end of the Gondwanas came as late as 1780, when the Marattas took it over. But coming back to the Moghul period, some other states also arose there known as Deogarh, once a tributary of Gondwana and Chanda, which covered the territories in the southern region comprising part of the Andhra Pradesh today. The first Raja of Chanda had his stronghold in Manikgarh Fort. Those long years of military encounters between the Moghuls and the Gonds are immortalized in ballads and tales. When the Moghuls got established in the Deccan, they finally brought these Gond kingdoms under their suba of Berar during Aurangzeb's time. The *Ain-i-Akbari* of Abul Fazal describes the Gond territory. But judging from ballad records, one concludes that the Gonds were perpetually in rebellion against the Moghuls. However controversial the dates or achievements of the Gond rule, the fact is that Gond kings did rule for centuries. The Buddhist relics found near the Wardha river point to the entry and prevalence of Buddhism in this area. It points to a lot of pioneering developmental work, however primitive it may seem today.

Story of the Birth of the Gods

On the Merugiri mountain were born 300 gods. Out of them arose Papiniranjun Pen who declared: "I am the greatest of the 300 gods." After him rose Niraniranjun Pen who announced: "Among all the 300 gods I am the greatest." At this moment, he saw Niraniranjun Pen and their glances met and merged into each other, Niraniranjun conceived in the palm of her hand, and after nine hours, the swelling burst, and a beautiful girl came forth called Kalikankali. One day, passion rose in her bosom as she happened to look at the fifty-six crores of gods bathing in the sea and instantly conceived. When she returned with the water pitcher, her grandfather, Nirankar Tapedari, suspicious of her condition, weighed her in the scales with five jasmine flowers and found her heavy. In great anger, he shouted at her: "Worthless girl your virtue is lost and my life is ruined. Go far, far away." Kalikankali left weeping. However, when the time came for her to deliver, she sat down and trees sprang up around her for support and shelter. She brought forth Gond gods in clusters of Gond Telugu and Maratta gods. Weary and tired, she trekked back to her grandfather begging for food. When he made her open her mouth, he put a burning piece of coal in it and burnt her up.

Shambhu Mahadev and Parvati, wandering around, came upon the whimpering babies in the forest. Parvati picked and wrapped them up in her golden sari and took them to Merugiri, inside the nine-walled Dawragiri. She suckled the children (Gond gods and other children) at her breasts. But while her left breast remained full, the right shrivelled and dried up. Parvati and Mahadev became concerned at it, but she kept her pregnancy a secret. So he consulted the book which records all that occurs in the world, and discovered the cause. He told Parvati that the Gond gods needed solid food and not milk.

The Gond gods were dissatisfied. So Mahadev decided to teach them a lesson. Out of the dirt of his body he made a squirrel, and as he stroked the body with his three fingers, he blew life into it and it ran off. The Gond gods ran after it into the Sursuryadi cave. Shambhu Mahadev cursed them for twelve years of imprisonment, and shut the entrance with a palmyra tree to keep it in place Beside the cave, he also got a banyan tree to grow up, and placed the Rainswal bird on its branches to keep guard

In Poropoltar Bijlipura, there lived Jalkadevmadsor and Queen

Hiradevi. Their son Pahandi was born with a linga on his hands, feet, throat and head, so he came to be called Lingal. Because of this freak his mother refused to nurse him, and left him in a deep forest. There he was discovered by a sage Sonkhastar guru who read a prophecy in his great book that this child would perform great feats for Gond gods as he was to be their priest. So the sage decided to bring this boy up. When his education was completed, the sage gave him a book, a bow and arrow, a gun and a guitar, and sent him to his parents. His father then handed over the kingdom to him.

Lingal continued to live in Bijlipura, but was sad at heart not knowing what had befallen the Gond gods. Jangubai, a goddess, was moved to pity by his sorrow. To help him she hid herself in a Kosa silk cocoon. "Perhaps, he will find me when he goes hunting," she said. Lingal's forehead brushed against this cocoon while walking through the forest. He carried it home and put it into a pot. Suddenly, the pot stirred and out came a beautiful damsel who addressed Lingal: "It is for you that I have come. You are the priest of the Gond gods, yet you know not where they are. If you promise to give me one kin-group of Gond gods, I will help you find them." Lingal demurred, but she exhorted him to go into the forest and search. She herself promised help.

He roamed the forests in vain. He also sought Shambhu Mahadev's help, but without avail. Finally, he decided to end his life rather than live without his gods, and hanged himself from a tree over Shambhu Mahadev's well. Parvati seeing him thus pointed out the path along which they had gone. He came to the cave and began to play on his guitar. The gods were deeply stirred and recognized the strains from their priest's music.

Lingal now called on Jangubai. The Rainswal birds, each carrying an elephant on their back, as food for their young ones arrived and would have destroyed Lingal, but for Jangubai who destroyed them instead. She cleared the cave entrance and released the gods. Lingal then led them to *poropatar* uplands, Dhanegaon. He was faced with the problem of feeding. He sought the help of many, but none came forward. Finally, he fed them on the god's rice which he had grown himself.

Origin

The Gonds trace their origin and ancestry to the Pandava prince and

his famous tribal spouse, Hidamba. Now they discussed among themselves with some dismay that they had no kin-groups. So they appealed to Lingal to correct this. So Lingal journeyed to Visa Guru, the sage who tended the sacred fire. He gave four iron spears from the fire to be given to the four Gond kin-groups to be formed (saga as the Gonds call them). To one, the seven-brother group, he gave a white chauwur, whisk, to the other, the six-brother group, the black chauwur, the five-brother group, also a black chauwur, and the four-brother group, the white again. Each also got a spear, *sale*. As each group stood up to receive its symbol, it turned from gods, *penk* into men, *wenk*. Lingal thereupon instructed the Gonds to conduct themselves in their new releationship. Marriages were celebrated and families set up. Then dan guru, the pardhan, was fetched with his four sons and one was given to each group to become that clan's card.

The Gonds have quite a novel form of living. They dwell in a complex of four huts, one for their living, one as stable, one multipurpose, and one for guests.

Religion and Duties

Each clan worships a clan god known as Persa pen, a great god. Originally, the shrine lay within the original ancestral clan land. But as the clans split into sub-clans and spread out, the Persa Pen cult also got dispersed. The Persa Pen shrine is attached to every settlement where the priest and guardian of the god reside. It may be in the woods or a field or in the vicinity of tombs of prominent clan members. It must be made clear, however, that these Gond tombs do not contain the dead. They are more in the nature of memorials embellished with wooden posts, flags, etc. The shrine is an oblong shed with a very low thatched roof and an earthen floor, though originally, cowdung-plastered. Open on all sides, it was of stone having a low-forked wooden post, holding up on the forks a large earthen pot covered by an upturned saucer, to carry all the ritual articles. Near-by, on a platform or board, will be the Sati stones coated with red paint, and small saucer-like oil lamps called ban. The number of Sati stones correspond to the clan's number of wen. The Sati stone represents legendary ancestors, while the ban are in memory of the dead clan's priests. Then there are drums and spears planted in the ground. Strangely enough, the main symbol, the spear is not kept in the

shrine but hidden away in the branches of the mohua tree by the priest. The chauwur is actually the symbol of a female deity, but the Gonds take it as the tail of their god's cow. There is a small ceremony attached to acquring it, though it is from an ordinary shop. When one has to be selected, the Gond bathes that night and waits for the god to appear to him in a dream to indicate the shop he dwells.

The Gond priest's primary task is to tend the ritual articles of Persa Pen celebration, and hide the *sale*, spear, after each feast. He also keeps track of the clan members who die to give peace to their spirit. Another important functionary who assists is the pradhan, who alone can chant the epics, legends, invocations and also plays the fiddle at the rites.

The only clan outside these four is the Sarpe Saga devoted to Jangubai. In their clan feasts, they use six bells and a bamboo stave of six nodes. The Sarpe Saga came into existence when Pahandi Lingal returned to Bijlipura after twelve years of success. He related to Jangubai how the four clans had been settled on four different estates. She asked about her cult and complained that for full twelve years she had struggled for it while she got nothing for her services to him in return, "How could you forget, oh brother?" she reprimanded him. "How can I return home emptyhanded?" she bemoaned. She strode up to Shambhu Mahadev and demanded a priest. The book of the future was consulted and found that her priest would be born in Parandoli, her own seat. When she returned home, she found the newly born. When he grew to manhood, she took him to the Asasurkota, the kingdom of Raja Maravi Gajba, whose daughther, Gadal Somo, was ready for marriage.

When this Raja heard the young man was Jalpati Jakal, the Gond Raja of Sarpe Saga, he seemed right for his girl. However, when he ordered the marriage liquor Jalpati declined to drink since his god did not. Jalpati married Gadal Somo and took over the kingdom. They had four sons and eight grandsons who came to head the eight Sarpe Saga clans.

Each Gond clan has a god represented by material objects which can even be a piece of cloth embroidered with figures of bullock, deer snake, elephant. They also worship two female deities. Bhawanimata represented by a brass figurine on a clod of clay with an impression of trisul, trident, on it, and Rathmai, mother night.

During the Persa Pen celebration, the third day is entirely dedicated to the clan ancestors and the dead Thus, the ceremonies not only

bring together and cement the ties between the living and the newly departed but also the ancient deified clan ancestors.

The Sati stones are supposed to grow themselves out of the ground when a meritorious woman attains a divine status. The male counterparts are the Kaml, also stones but of larger size going up to two feet. They are far rarer than Sati stones. Mundas, wooden posts, are set up to offer sacrifices if there is scarcity of rain. Mention has already been made of the *ban*, small earthen lamps, thickly coated with vermilion. They are in memory of distinguished members of the priest's family or of any other guardian of the shrine.

The worship of deities and ancestors forms part of the Gond household. In every hut, there is a low earthen platform where an oil lamp keeps burning in a corner of the kitchen known as Pen Komta. It is plastered daily and morsels of food scattered there. Persa Pen worshipped in the house is called Rota Pen which must never be defiled.

Each clan is also associated with one or more totemic animal, killing of which is taboo.

Dance

The Gond dances are amongst the most colourful. In fact, the birth of dance has the following legend behind it. The Gonds had a good life and wanted to express their happiness through a dance festival. The dance festival starts with the Akari rite around June-July when cattle are sent away to the forest. Then the drums used in these rites are brought out. They cover a wide range. The right to own these drums is a hereditary one. The para drums are small double membrane ones, slightly thickened in the middle and played with both hands, the player sitting cross-legged, resting the drum against his knee. Turbuli is a saucer-shaped single membrane drum made of wood, burnt clay or iron, about ten inches in diameter, and beaten with two slender bamboo sticks. Gumela is a flask-shaped bottle drum of burnt clay with a single membrane cover. It is beaten with the right hand, while the left hand alternatively opens and closes the narrow-necked opening. They are always played in pairs as an accompaniment to dance songs in very soft tones. All the drums are ceremoniously made, starting with the cutting of wood. The playing is also started with an invocation and sacrifice to Dundaria Raur who intiated drums to bless them. A peg is driven in at the dance floor and the owner of the drum places his right heel on it and swings round. All

the dancers then repeat this swing.

The god of dancing is Yetmasar Pen. The formal opening rite for the dancing festival is performed around Diwali new moon. It is the day for offering the first fruit of the millet to Hura Pen. The Dandari dancers are held in high esteem, and when they visit a village for a dance, a formal reception is accorded to them. The performance must open and close with the Sarkola dance, the greeting dance. As the soft notes of the drums float out, the dancers take up their batons with brass-embossed handles to form a circle of men and women. The dance starts with slow movements when the dancers have their faces turned inwards and cross their feet over as they move sideways, clicking sticks all the while. When the circle is coming back to its original position, the girls called chickens stand still, the boys called sambar move in front of them clicking sticks until the circle is complete. Then all dancers bend low with sticks touching the ground, advance with small steps to greet the gods in all the four directions, then form the circle again, put the sticks down and clap. The musicians sing in a soft voice, one group starting a line and the other finishing it. These are called geumela songs, since they are accompanied by the drum of that same name. There is a sweet haunting quality in the tune. The words are simple. Here is one:

Boy: O wasp-waisted, who are you girl?
Girl: A champa flower is Lachu Bai, waist like a gumela, my boy.
A champa flower is Lachu Bai.
Boy: Let us go to the bazaar, oh girl. Let me buy you a sari.

Samdi Kola is another dance which also starts with a circle formation, boy and girl alternating. With slow side-steps, swinging and clicking of sticks, the entire circle moves anticlockwise. Slowly, the girls step in facing boys, forming an inner circle. The process is repeated with the boys now forming an inner circle. The scene is embellished by three huge figures who rush into the dance group with clubs on their shoulders in stiff goat-skin cloaks, turbans with huge crown of peacock feathers on their head. Their faces look highly exaggerated by fantastic moustaches and bushy beards, eyes ringed with white paint, bodies naked except for a coloured loincloth, but painted all over and covered with loads of shell chains. They are known as the Gusari, and their strange dress is a relic of the time when this fabulous head-dress was obtained from Birnandi Guru. They walk among

the people and cause a lot of mirth and hilarity. Finally, they take the stage. First they move up and down rhythmically with three abreast, tripping first on heel and then toe, holding the clubs like swords to the playing of kettle drums and the lapna drum. "We are the horses of the Gonds," they cry out.

They form a little circle, keep stamping their feet to the rhythm, whirling now and then, throwing open their wide cloaks. The bells on their wrists and elbows tingle as they dance. The first dance of the day is Kaiser Kola, the broom dance, demonstrating the cleaning chores of the morning. There is a pretty song for this broom dance.

In a garden at Sitagondi grows the jeita flower.
Sweeping, sweeping my hips ache at the sight of boys and girls.
The flowers open in blossom, at the sight of old men and women
The flowers shrivel and die;
At the sight of tiny children buds burst forth anew.

They do the sambar dance drawing first a picture of speed and friskiness. There is the wagtail dance of the maize. Here is one of the songs:

I'll go to the market at Deogarh, oh mother.
I'll yoke the bulls to a trotting cart, oh mother.
I'll dress in a sari worth an elephant, oh mother,
I'll put on a blouse worth a calf, oh mother.
Like a bandicoot's tail the paint on my eyes, oh mother.

The Gonds also put on small dramas, skits and pantomimes. The themes are drawn from their everyday life and events.

When the Dandari dancers are about to depart, there is a formal but touching farewell where they are given presents. At the village outskirts, local women stop them to answer their questions.

Women: To which land are you going, brothers?
Dancers: To the land of gold we go, gold in plenty we will bring.
The women repeat the question:
Dancers: To the land of diamonds we go, diamonds in plenty we'll bring.
Women: Bring them then, but the tiger's gate we have closed.
Give us our toll, oh brothers.

Dancers: What must be given we will give, oh girls.
Women: Rafters and bindings, how many are there, brothers.
Their number you shall tell us.
Dancers: If we cannot tell you, we will give you diamonds in plenty.
If we cannot tell we will give you gold in plenty.
If we cannot tell we will give you the boy of the Akara Drums.

The women dance laying full arms over the shoulders of the neighbours. They wear bright coloured saris and heavy silver ornaments. The dance is led by a girl carrying a bunch of grass and flowers, waving them like a wand of flowers. Their song is mostly of their epics, kings and heroes.

Wherever the dancers go, they are received with a lot of courtesy with their feet washed and given snuff tobacco.

Festivals

The festival of the first sowing is performed with the bursting of the first rain in June called Bur Bhawe, on the eve of the first sowing to ensure the safe germination of the seed, in the form of a sacrifice for the goddess, Aki Pen, the guardian deity of the village. Seven men and a few boys go into the woods with provisions for cooking, and the most important of all, new grain tied up in a cloth. They gather before a sanctuary made of three altars: stones, clay-horses and three poles with white flags. Here, seeds of all kinds are measured with leaf cups in a big leaf-plate, and placed before the stones on which vermilion and turmeric power are sprinkled. Then patterns with coloured powder are drawn respectively on a mound of the earth, a leaf and the ground. Incense is offered over each altar. All men and boys form a semi-circle and burn the incense along the line, and give each some seed-grains which they hold between folded hands and pray silently before lying prostrate (for Gonds say their prayers silently):

Look, mother, we begin sowing, give us good fortune
May the crops be good, may there be no fear of tiger or snake.
Through jungle and valley we wander, keep us safe.

At the altar in front of the stone, a row of seven heaps of millet is made, and the grey fowl put through the picking test. This procedure

is repeated then at the other altar with white flags. The fowl is then offered as a sacrifice. A pot of millet cooked separately is placed over two leaf platters at the altar with a few pieces of roasted liver. It is sprinkled over the pattern drawn on the stone. Then all eat the sacrificial food. The seed grain standing across the altar throughout the rituals is again measured in the leaf cups. There is rejoicing if it is found to be more than it was in the beginning. The increase or decrease in the consecrated grain is taken as an omen for the prospects of that year's crop. This grain is then distributed amongst the villagers, and dedicated to mother goddess. This ritual is known as "Wifa," which means seed. The same night, there is another rite performed known as Widri, at the posts sacred to *Aki*, the village guardian. It resembles in some ways the "Wifa," except that only a single heap of millet is placed. By then, mother earth is supposed to be cleansed of impurities, and ready to receive offerings. Some of the sacrificial food is offered to the village mother, and the seed grain distributed to the villagers.

But the vital rites are held only in the night. Six men, including the priest, gather at the headman's where a measure of millet is provided. Some of this is kept apart, the rest of the millet is ground on a stone and cooked. This is then taken together with an egg-laying hen to the mahua tree. At the spot sacred to the village, Persa Pen, the priest, makes the sacrifice and offers it along with the cooked millet. They eat some of this food under the mahua tree and leave the rest at the shrine. Next morning, it is usually eaten by the herd boys.

The millet seed saved at the headman's house is wrapped up in as many leaf parcels as there are households, and each is left that night on the roof of the house. Next morning, the householder puts this grain into his basket for the sowing, when it will be the last of the seed to be sown into the earth.

At sunrise, after the night ritual, each householder with his family goes to the field and finds a place where he lays his axe, sickle, plough and the seed for sowing. The head of the family waves lit incense sticks over implements and seed, and puts water from a brass vessel. He then takes various kinds of seed grain, and holding it for a moment in cupped hands towards the rising sun, scatters a little over millet heaps, and the rest over the cleared ground before the implements. His wife hands him a white cock which he raises to the east as he prays: "Mother earth, come to our help, lift your head and look at us, give us wealth and good fortune." With this, he raises the cock

to his forehead, then sets it to peck the grain. Immediately, it is offered as a sacrifice at the altar along with the millet. The family then eats, setting aside a few morsels for the dead.

Then comes the ceremonial sowing called Mohtur. Mohtur is a rite initiating an agricultural cycle. The family head stands upright facing east, holding the sowing basket in both hands and touching it to his forehead. With a silent prayer to mother earth, he scatters the first seeds over the altar, the field implements and the cleared patch. The throwing is done by all the members of the family by turn. Later, the implements are lifted from the altar and the ploughing starts. Some seed consecrated at the rituals is carried home in the basket for later sowing. The ploughing is done in pairs, but only by husband and wife, not even brother and sister. The rest of the day is given over to festivities, songs, games, merry-making, wearing new and gay clothes.

Rituals are performed on two consecutive days in order to secure divine protection to the herds and the herdsmen when the cattle is sent to the forest. For the first, men assemble at the village border and a sacrifice is made to the deity of the herds, Datur-Anwal, appealing:

Look Daturi mother, may we remain well,
May from today calves and cows remain well,
May feet and arms suffer no hurt.

As the cattle are driven out, they have to go over the place of the rite. The next day, one is supposed to secure their safe return when the season ends. It is known as Akari, done in honour of Polum Rajah (*Polum* is forest), a deity holding sway over hills and forests. Towards midday, all men and boys of the village go to the forest, the bells on the halters of the bullocks jingling, arriving before the sanctuary stone under the dondera tree. The village priest prays to Rajul Pen, specially worshipped at hilltop sanctuaries. A separate offering is made to Gauri Pen who protects cattle from tigers. When the millet and curry are cooked, a young man takes the sacred spear from the altar, salutes it and draws a line between the sacrificial place and the foot of the knoll, while turmeric powder is dropped along the whole length of the line. The herd of cattle is made to move directly along the turmeric line. When it crosses that, a terrific din is set up with the cheering and shouting of the crowd, the blowing of horns by cattle boys, and the panicky galloping of animals set off by the firing of guns! It is believed that the louder the noise, the more effectively

will lurking dangers be averted, and the faster the animals move the better they will elude all perils.

Then there is the ceremonial wedding. Several young boys assemble in a field, measure off a portion of the field by bamboo lengths which space themselves out across it. They race straight for the edge of the field shouting and bending low through the young crop, plucking weeds here and there as they run. A day before *Jamar Amas*, new moon in rainy season, the village boys and men go to the forest and cut bamboos for stilts which are called Kodang, horses. These boys then go round from house begging for millet flour and pulses, reciting this traditional verse:

"The gods we will worship give us grain, we are the herdsmen." With this food-stuff, the boys drive the cattle to a stone sacred to Chopun Pen, god of the saltlick, a patch of salty clay, which the animals lick while the boys offer sacrifice, cook and finally feast after having blown their horns. The same evening after the cattle-return to their sheds, a ritual in honour of Dodi Marke, the mother of the cowsheds, is performed. Young men of each cattle-owner's household take cakes fried in oil, millet, flour and milk to the cattle sheds, and the priest or whoever acts as one, draws two altar patterns in vermilion and turmeric powder, one on the doorway and another near the doorpost. He offers sacrifice and cooked food and milk in a leaf cup to Dodi Marke, scatters some food on the ground and throws some into the cowshed, and gives the remnants to a cow.

The end of the rains finds the earth swelling with many a crop, but no matter how tempting, no one dares even nibble the end of a corn or the stem of a cucumber. When night falls, the youngsters gather to sing songs of the new crops and vegetables, to the accompaniment of para and gumela drums.

The offerings of the first ears and first vegetable "Nowon" and their partakings are important rituals soon after the millets ripen. The villagers decide on a day, and two young men, perhaps the brothers of the headman, first go to Aki Pen where they sprinkle water, burn incense, then make an altar of the new grain and scatter ghee and lentils. They go round each shrine performing the same simple ceremony. All the clan members in the village gather in the field of one clan member, and together they offer the first field and garden harvest to their great god Persa Pen, then the dead ancestors of the clan. The ceremony is performed by the priest who makes two mounds of the new grain, one of five heaps with a sixth in front for the Persa

Pen on the right, and eight heaps on the left with a ninth in front for *sati*, the divine ancestors. This consecration is then done in front of a carved baton.

There is another variation of this. For instance, in the Atrom clan, the boys and men gather in the middle of a maize-field, where a patch has been cleared, and the priest makes two small longish cowdung mounds. A clansman then gathers some maize, beans, cucumbers and several ears of grain brought from another field and the priest burns incense. Holding the new grain between their folded hands, they stand in a semi-circle saying this prayer:

We are eating the new food, grant us good health. God of our house, grant us your favour.
Oh village mother the food offered to you we eat.
Look ancestors this is for you.

Then they bow down to the ground, and the priest makes on each mound six heaps of the new grain brought cooked from the village, dipping his finger in ghee and dropping a little on each heap. This process is repeated then by the others.

There follows the ritual eating of this new grain. It is poured into brass bowls, kept near the altar, god's corner, as it is called, where burns a small oil lamp on a brass stand, then heaped on the winnowing fans lying opposite the hearth. Next, a bundle of ficus leaves are arranged under the lamps in six pairs, in an overlapping line. Another six pairs of leaves are set aside on a large tray and heaped with the same grain. Ghee and lentils are placed first before the pen komta, and then poured over the top of the soma. Starting with the priest's wife, women and girls of the household bow down one by one before the god's corner, sprinkle a little water, and taking some morsels of cooked soma, scatter them over six pairs of leaves. Lastly, they drop some water over the leaves to signify the end of the ritual. The leaves are then taken to the roof and placed in a horizontal row on the thatch above the door. The priest's wife and others throw a handful of the new grain on to the roof for the great god Persa Pen, then scatter some in the street for the dead. The ritual closes after two or three days when three young men of the headman's family go to the shrine of Kindi Anwal where the ceremony on the eve of the first sowing had taken place. There they offer six small maize cobs, five of which they place on the altar, while the grains of the sixth are scattered

over the offering. The ceremony ends with soliciting Kindi Anwal's blessing.

The *durari* (boundary) festival is celebrated on the full moon night of Holi. This is supposed to given expression to the concept of the village as a ritual unit. As it is mainly the responsibility of the village headman, he provides the small wheat breads and the round lentil cakes called garka. The villagers contribute only coconut. In the headman's house, two small frames of bamboo or wood are made. To each of which ten garka, ten wheat breads, ten onions, ten bits of coconut and ten blossoms are hung on strings. At sunset, men and boys collect outside the headman's house with drums and torches, and the frames with dangling eatables fastened to two long bamboo poles. Two processions are formed each headed by a man carrying one of the poles, and these wend their way in opposite directions through the streets to a previously selected site outside the village. The drummers and torch-bearers lead with other villagers carryinglo gs, dry branches and bundles of straw. In an open space the processions meet and halt, the two poles then set up slanting. Into each of the base of the poles, a raw egg is placed. These poles represent Matral and Matri, a legendary couple associated with ancient cultivation.

Round these poles, logs and branches are heaped, over which the priest sprinkles water and scatters sweetened cooked lentils asking Durari Anwal, the mother of the village boundary, to accept the offerings. Fire is set then to the two stacks, and in the light of the mounting flames, men and boys race round the shouting. As the base of the bamboo burns out and they are about to collapse, the people crowd round holding out their scarves to catch the eatables from the frames, which are accepted as gifts from Matral and Matri. They are distributed amongst the villagers as symbols of the good harvest. Next morning, the young men go round begging for corn millet. This is boiled near the ashes of the poles. Each householder takes a little of the cooked millet to his field and performs what is called Kuta Mohtur, which symbolizes resowing, a ceremony we have already noted, Kuta being the dried Jawari stubble standing in the field.

There is a picturesque festival around April-May celebrated by the entire community on a starlit night. Under the mahua tree, Chanchi Bhiman and Persa Bhiman are worshipped in a booth built of jamun leaves over the two stones sacred to them. Two small posts of mohua wood, a handspan high, are bent against them to represent the god and his bride, for this is supposed to be the wedding of Chanchi

Bhiman with Drupati, referred to in their songs as Siro. The altar inside the booth is washed, oiled and anointed with turmeric paste and patterns drawn with millet flour. Then sacrifices are offered. Simultaneously, a procession of women comes from the village, singing and drumming. In the middle, under a white cloth canopy, the priest's wife carries a light in a brass pot carefully sheltering it with her sari. The song is about the mahuwa tree:

Barrel-like my trunk, oh flowers of the mahuwa tree,
Basket-like my clusters, oh flowers of the mahuwa, mother,
Tap tip tap tip they fall, the flowers of the mahuwa, mother,
My people will gather flowers of the mahuwa mother,
My people will distil liquor from flowers of the mahuwa mother
My people will drink, oh flowers of the mahuwa, mother,
Dumb men will wax loquacious, oh flowers of the mahuwa Mother.

The song goes on in this strain. When it ends, women enter the booth and put their lamps before the altar. An unmarried girl dips a ficus leaf into the turmeric water and sprinkles it over the two posts representing the bride and bridegroom as is usually done at weddings. Meanwhile, the entire gathering of women sits outside the booth and sings one of the songs describing Bhiman eating the new Nowon. Only then mahuwa flowers or any other produce can be taken out of the village and sold. Before that, they can only be eaten by the people of the village themselves.

After the meal, a stack of millet straw and dry bamboo is piled up in the field before the booth. Two young men, one dressed as a woman, appear, representing Matral and Matri, light the fire, jump across the flames using a bamboo as a kind of a pole jumper. They make obeisance to the fire, sprinkle water and stand with folded hands. When the fire dies down, these two beat the ashes down and spread it over the ground. Some young boys crowd round Matri, begging for food, while she pretends to dole out grain from her basket, after which they run around over the ashes.

Then they act all the agricultural operations, sowing, reaping and gathering the ears into their clothes. The grain is finally emptied on the floor, and to the beating of drums, Matri and Matral jump about as if threshing out grain with their feet. When the grain is said to be heaped, Matral pretends to measure out large baskets of the same, the crowd counting each basket loudly and echoing it. It is supposed

to be a rich harvest and all demand their share. Movements of giving out to each are gone through. They all pretend to tie up the grain in their clothes. As they wind their way home, the drums are beaten and there is general fraternization.

The stories describing the origin of the clan deities of the Gonds and performances of their divine ancestors are recounted in an elaborate ritual that forms a very vital part of Gond culture. These tales are recited and sung by the pardhans who officiate as bards to the Gonds. And amongst all the deities propitiated by recitation and sung on these occasions, Persa Pen stands high. Pahandi Kupar Lingal had instructed the ancestors of the tribe in the cult of deities to be worshipped by each of the four phratries, and procured for them the four symbols: *sale* (spear); *chauwar* (whisk); *gagra* (bells); *kati* (bamboo staves); all of which are now used in the ritual of Persa Pen. The whisk symbolizes the female deity, the hair standing for the long tresses of the goddess and the spearhead for her son, Bandesara.

The festival of *Persa Pen* is the most important one among the Gonds. It is celebrated on the day of Persa Bhawe moon around early May at the start of summer. As the moon rises, six men go silently to the Aki Pen, the village guardian, and light a small fire. The sacred objects kept in an earthen pot are bathed in water and sacrifice offered. Early next morning, to the roar of drums and wail of trumpets, the priest offers worship to the Persa Pen to the recitation of prayers seeking protection against all dangers. The Persa Pen pot must always be guarded and never left alone. The young men erect a shelter of leaves in front of the village priest's house.

Later, the village men gather on a newly ploughed field and open the sacred pot containing the ritual objects, and take out the chauwar and the sale, the five large brass bells and nine Sati stones. A ritual is then gone through of washing the whisk in four substances, like cow's milk, urine and oil, all of which are poured over it by turn. The whisk is then combed and rubbed dry, the oil being poured last. Similarly, the spearhead is washed next and then the brass bells. A strip of red cloth with a twine is tied round the head of a bamboo with five nodes, over which is tied a red cloth with tassels, and the bamboo fitted into the hollow halt of the whisk so that its hair falls over the upper edge of the cloth. Under this, the bells are tied tightly, and last the spearhead tied to the bamboo under the cloth.

The priest plants the bamboo firmly in the ground, the hair and spearhead gleaming, the red cloth billowing in the breeze as men and boys stand around in a semi-cricle, open to the east. Suddenly, the drums and trumpets blare out, and the priest drops incense over a piece of smouldering wood and waves it twice round the deity, raises it up to his chin standing silent and praying. He goes round to the line of worshippers in a semi-circle, each of whom cups his hands together to catch the incense smoke. It is then replaced before the deity.

As they all pray for protection and prosperity, they throw themselves on the ground full length face downwards for a few moments. The priest pulls the bamboo out of the ground, while two shoulder the spears and others pick up the baskets with the Sati stones and other ritual objects. They all make a round of the semi-circle, the priest leading with the Persa Pen, greeting each with "Ram Ram," shaking the idol and the brass bells. Tinkling incessantly, some embrace, other's salute with folded hands or bow down and touch the priest's feet, and a few, getting possessed, throw themselves on the ground trembling. After this, they all move in a procession, young men dancing and leaping with spears. The deity is carried by Bhaktal, the seer of the village, known to be sensitive to the wishes of the god. When the Bhaktal halts at a spot, the deity is supposed to favour it. So a spear is thrust into the site and the deity tied to it. At one side, a deep hole is dug and a flat stone brought from the jungle laid beside the hole. The hole symbolizes the primeval cave where the Gond ancestors were once imprisoned, and the stone slab with which the cave had been locked. Throughout this and all other festivals, all objects coming into contact with the deity, water, milk or food, have to be thrown into this hole.

Persa Pen visits the shrines of the village gods, the stalls of the village cattle, the streams and wells where the villagers draw water, the houses of the priest and the headman. The musician play their *Kinhri*, fiddles, the drums, trumpets, while boys keep swinging their curved swords as they rush ahead, others throw up their arms to brandish the long and pointed heavy-headed spears glistening in the sunshine. Many ritual objects, such as Sati stones and clay horses are carried in baskets over the turbans. The men tie coloured scarves to lend colour to their white-clad figures. When the procession reaches the Aki shrine, the village guardian, water and sweetened lentils are sprinkled. The Persa Pen greets the Aki when the priest bends forward

with long hair of his whisk nearly touching the Aki post. When the priest stops the music, the drums slow down to a soft vibrato.

Outside the priest's house the procession stops. His wife pours water over the deity as the bamboo rests on a big stone and catches the drips in a silver vessel. The chauwar is also set up, its bamboo shaft resting on a piece of back. The small ritual spear is stuck in the ground close to it, and on either side two heavy ceremonial altars set up. While at the back stand young men with raised swords, as though on guard, all women come forward gaily dressed and covered with ornaments to worship. They sprinkle water with leaves and bow to the ground. Then an unmarried girl brings five pots of fresh water and is given a few coins by the priest's wife. The Persa Pen, which has become dusty after a long travel, is bathed with water from the five pots. This water is considered sacred and is preserved by women as it drips down. The deity is screened by the white cloth when women bring their food offerings in brass dishes. The priest dips the whisk into the millet gruel, then lets its drippings fall into each householder's cloth, dhoti or sari, praying for success and prosperity. The gruel is smeared over their grain baskets in the hope of a good harvest. The procession moves on, men and women dancing with their knees and backs bent in slow steps, known as damsa. The procession goes to the sacred mahuwa tree to rest the deities and the ritual objects under it. They get some sleep for themselves too.

At the crack of dawn, the drums and trumpets call them to carry the Persa Pen to the river for a ceremonial bath. Every time they approach a village, people *en route* rush out to salute the Persa Pen. At the river, the water is first propitiated with a sacrifice. The whisk and all other ritual objects are bathed. Men too bathe, and after placing the deity under the trees, offer worship. The pardhan sings a pretty song:

Where am I going, oh brothers? In Chait month's heat,
My body is burning, in the deep water will I bathe,
Splashing the water, hitting the water.
Sixty brooks become one stream, sixty streams become one river,
Sixty rivers become one ocean, in that ocean's water will I bathe?

When the procession returns to the Pen-gera, where the ceremonies were performed, lights are lit and flames flicker like fairy objects. The same worship is gone through again. The Gonds consider the

repetition of the worship as an unalterable traditional practice.

At the altar, in front of the Persa Pen, the priest traces a design of turmeric powder, millet flour and vermilion. Five squares of turmeric powder are drawn side by side, and two small heaps of rice placed before them, five in a row and a sixth in front. The chicken pecking at the grain heap is gone through, and if it picks the grain, it is taken as a sign of the deity's acceptance of the sacrifice and vice versa. As each man puts his chicken to the test, he murmurs a prayer soliciting the god's favour. Next, three goats are brought. They must shake their whole body as a sign of their being acceptable to the god. The belief arises from the legend that the god takes possession of the animal when it is acceptable. While the rites are in progress, women come down to the shrine singing, and begging the deity to accept the offerings. The dawn breaks by then.

After the feast, the ritual symbols are put into the earthen pot after carefully folding up the cloth and the bells, and putting the spear in a wooden sheath. To the accompaniment of drumming and music, the pot is placed in the fork of the three-pronged post. The spearhead is kept ceremonially in the fork of a branch of a mahuwa tree, while singing continues. The night following the festival end is spent in listening to the bards chanting the epic tales of the Gonds.

A household god known as Rota Pen may be considered an aspect of the Persa Pen. Apart from the daily food offering, propitiatory offerings are made when there are quarrels in the house or disturbances in the village, which may rouse, it is feared, the wrath of the deity. This also holds true when a child is born in the family or a wedding performed.

Songs seem to be woven into the very texture of the Gonds. Not only every incident in life has a song to go with it, but every human mood, every verve of the mind finds an expression in song. In fact, one can see the working of their entire social fabric in vivid pictures through their songs. A striking example of this is the manner a pregnant woman's fears are allayed, even her caprices pandered to by appropriate songs through the long and weary nine months. Songs are sung even during her labour troubles. Relatives and friends around break into a song at the moment of birth while the child's sex is being revealed. Its runs as follows:

I would bear a son.
Outside the house, sounds a

Drum, inside cries the girl.
Worry not, my lord,
Bud of the sunflower shall be her name.

Marriage is another great occasion for songs. From the erection of the pavilion to the departure of the wedding party, everything has a song to match, and while the first event starts with great gaiety, the farewell songs are poignantly wistful. During the ceremony itself, the songs are in praise of the beauty of the couple. Here are a few wedding songs:

When you cut down a tree
New shoots appear.
That pretty girl
Is making signs at me.

It is a cart if you know
How to drive boy.
It is food if you know how
To eat boy.
It is a path, if you know how
to walk boy.
It is a horse if you know how
to ride boy.

The evening is pleasant
Like a petal of koora flower.
The fair bride shines over
The wooden seat.
Let us go and fix the wedding
The fair bride shines over
the wooden seat.

Why did you strike the drum
O my young love?
The drum roars
And my palace resounds with music,
It echoes in the balcony,
It sounds in the attic,
It thunders in my private apartments.

O my bridegroom, tarry you more a while,
Let me say goodbye to my mother, O love.
What have you to do with the mother now, my bride,
Come away hearken to your duties,
Near the big house are the tents of your daughter
She goes to another land.
If you are prosperous, do bring me back, my father.
O my daughter, the wealth is less and battle more,
But be sure we will bring you back.

When a Gond takes his sister's daughter as his wife it is described as "Dudh Lautana," return of the milk!

Society

The Gonds live and function in large joint families, the unit known as Bhai Bund. It takes care of the day-to-day work and management. When more join it and it expands, it becomes a Bhaibiradari. This carries out larger projects, like irrigation, bunding, etc., with greater ease.

Arts and Crafts

Gond wall-decorations are made with a thick stick in mud or clay mixed with chaff and water. It is a difficult medium done only by women who are proficient in this art. When a house is under construction, the mud of the wall is kept damp for the patterns to be imposed upon it, done in high relief. Only then it is covered with cow dung or lime. The woman plans by making a simple frame right round it. Within this frame, she may add one or two others at successively lower levels of relief. These frames are often simple lines or bars, occasionally enhanced with raised scrolls or incised chevrons or bone patterns. But if the frame is a large one, it may be greatly elaborated with a large variety of motifs—conventionalized cobra-heads, single or double wavy lines, rows of lozenges, loops with small projections round the belly. The area may then be sub-divided into panels by broad bars enhanced with similar geometric motifs. Finally, the objects to be portrayed are plastered within the frame or panels, generally on a slightly lower relief than the outer surrounding lines. The human figure is indicated by a pair of opposed triangles which

are sometimes filled in.

Gond craftsmen make a frame, two or three inches broad, round each leaf of the door, which they then divide into half a dozen small panels by bands which continue the general motif of the frame. He decorates frames or bands with a variety of geometric designs, the usual herring bone, zigzag hatching or rows of small lozenges. Within the panels, a design is carved—geometric, animal or human figure, circles, flower patterns formed of intersecting circles, a spiral, a circle enhanced with alternate triangles hatched in opposite directions. There can be triangles placed round circles.

The actual pictures are sometimes made by the simple incision of lines which may show an animal in outline with the body filled in with hatching or bands. A wall-decoration is modelled in mud and whitened with clay symbolizing human figures.

In all this carving and modelling, there is a basic simplicity. They appear without anatomical details, more in silhouette, sometimes a figure is replaced by a geometrical symbol. In one, a set of dancers are lost in a geometric pattern. A common method of symbolization is to show a thing by its parts. The breasts, for instance, suggest the human figure. A simple impression of a pair of wings turns gradually into a geometric figure. A fish is symbolized by bone, tortoise by its flippers. The former stands for fertility while the latter for stability, designed in white or red wash on the floor to ensure security of the house.

At a Patnulkaran marriage, the figure of a car is drawn on a wall, and the name of the bridegroom's clan written on it. The Gond-Pardhal wall-paintings for Krishna's birthday festival show Krishna playing the flute within the line frame and the milkmaids bringing him pots of milks, curds, wheat cakes. A herd of cows, trees, snakes and other objects or incidents connected with the Krishna story are also shown. The painting is in red and black against a white background. Some are quite elaborate. One shows a house with a banyan tree on either side, two rows of dancers one above the other with ten swords on one side and eight on the other, seven guns on the left and seven on the right. There is a wedding procession at the bottom, showing a litter followed by the marriage party on horseback. There is an elephant carrying the bride's treasure on its back. Honeycombs hang from either side of the banyan trees, while monkeys and squirrels climb all over to sip honey. Peacocks are also seen. Servants carry umbrellas. Near the main picture are minor ones showing peacock,

deer, giraffe, a potter with his pots, an archer shooting an arrow into the sky, a comb, the sun, moon and tortoise, a ṭiger eating a man, and an elaborate bed with a couple which, however, shows only one body with two heads. It is explained that when two are closely united, they have only one body between them.

Chapter Two

Tribalism in India

17 The Korachas of Karnataka

Korachas, also known as Koravas and Koramas, are a tribe of many incredibly diverse parts. Their name is supposed to be derived from *Kuru*, to divine, probably because of their fortune-telling, mainly which their women practice.

Origin

One story is that Parvati, Shiva's consort, disguised herself as a soothsayer, and the Korachas were her descendents. The other story is, a wood worker was asked to prepare a cradle for Parvati's child out of a serpent with its stomach filled with precious stones, but he took fright from the rattling sound of the stones. Then a Koracha was given the job, but care was taken to see that the serpent was tied up into knots to prevent the stone from rattling. The Koracha boldly split it as though it were a bamboo, and made a cradle. As a reward, Parvati presented the Koracha with a divining rod of the bamboo and a winnow she had been using herself for fortune-telling. That is how the Korachas took on this profession. There are many other tales. But coming down to history, the Korachas or Koravas once ruled south Kanara under a chief called Habashika. As far back as the time of Tipu Sultan, a regiment of the Korachas known as Kallai Bantaru, was in his service. They were known as much for their slyness and secretive

ways as for their toughness.

Society and Social Customs

There could not be many tribals having such diverse occupations as the Korachas. They are first split into two main divisions. The settled and the nomadic. The latter set up their temporary huts with arched coverings like cart hoods, the bent bamboos being stuck in the ground. When they move their camps, they simply carry these huts on bullocks. Their several divisions are based on different occupations which have now become endogamous. Their vocations have a wide and bewildering range: musicians, dancers, bamboo splitters, brush makers, sling and knot makers, tattooing, snake charmers, stone workers, salt carriers. The settled ones known as Uppu Korachas are argiculturists, but also engage in basketry and wicker work and are, therefore, also known as Dabbe Korachas. *Uppu* (salt) Korachas, before the introduction of mechanical transport, were the carriers of salt from the sea coast into the interior. Ettina Korachas transported goods and commodities on bullock backs; Kunchige Korachas, so called because they prepared Kuchinge, the brush used by weavers for starching yarn; the Sonai Korachas are named after the pipe which they play on. Thus, with a few exceptions, they naturally had to be on the move —with these occupations.

This is a community where marriage does not seem a must. The women can stay unmarried without being noticed. It is also permissible for the wife to be older than the husband. They avoid girls among their agnatic relations and others born in their own group, the affinity being traced through males. Marriage with an elder sister's daughter is allowed, but not that of a yonnger one, except in the case of a widower. There is, however, a binding custom among them that the first two daughters of a woman must be given by her to the brother on a reduced bride price known as tera, and he can either marry them himself or to his sons. If he does not do either, this right to them is exercised by his getting two-fifths of the amount payable for each of them at their marriage.

It is also a community which is least restricted by religious or social taboos where marriage alliance is concerned, except among some of the settled Korachas who tend to borrow non-tribal customs. No priest is needed except to consult the stars for fixing the day and nothing else. A couple of days before the actual ceremony,

the groom goes to the bride's house and presents her with a few coins, the acceptance of which signifies her consent. Two separate huts are erected, one for the girl, the other for the boy. For them ain rite, the couple sits on date palm mats between the two huts, the fringes of their clothes tied, and they worship with two pots kept on a date palm leaf. The groom's hand is placed over the bride's, then they tie on each other's wrist woollen and cotton threads twisted together along with a turmeric root, a betal leaf and a copper ring. Similar threads are tied to the pots also. Next morning, the uncle of either the bride or the bridegroom, whoever happens to be unmarried, cuts a branch of a jambool tree and places it by a well or a water course. Two men and three married women go there carrying two pots and a lamp, fill the pots with water and bring them to the bride's hut. The branch is fixed on a small dias in front of the bride's hut, and the pots deposited on a bed of rice. Two earthern plates filled with cotton and castor seed are placed on the pots and lit. They are kept burning until the ceremony is over. The belief is that if the flame keeps burning steadily, the marriage will be a success.

After the main rite, they also have the "pot searching" ceremony, more a game, when various types of coins are thrown into a lavishly decorated pot filled with red tinted water, and the couple is made to search and pick them up. In the evening, the couple have to eat from the same dish along with two men and three married women already mentioned. On this occasion, gifts are distributed to the assembled castemen.

An interesting event follows the demolition of the two huts. When the boy's hut is pulled down, its material together with the vessels used there are carried by the bride, while she drives her husband's donkeys at the same time to a new site. Here, she erects the hut again. She then fetches water and cooks some food and feeds the five married women who have accompanied her. This symbolizes the bride being set up as mistress. The hut is later demolished again, and the material tied up into bundles sunk into a pond or river.

Birth

There are no special ceremonies on this occasion. There is, however, a curious custom observed. When a child is born after the death of one or more children, the mother goes begging after her bath to a few houses to fulfil a vow, while the husband follows her with the

baby in his arms. Out of the money collected, a metal necklace is made to put around the child's neck. The nose is also bored and a ring inserted in the hole. A name is given to pretend that the child came because of the begging, so the past unhappy link is broken.

The Korachas also have a custom called voncade, according to which, when the wife delivers, the husband takes to bed and has to be treated as a patient. Where the custom is not fully observed, it is done nominally by giving the husband a little medicine prepared for the wife.

The Uru Korachas have a Setti and a Yajamana as their tribal functionaries to handle disputes and take care of their community problems. Their presence is necessary at all these social functions.

The wandering Korachas are divided into several groups, each with a *nayak*, headman. The group, however, is veryd emocratic and the headman's office is not hereditary. It goes to the most competent person who thus commands much respect. The group is very zealous of the welfare of the community. It meets periodically to settle their affairs, continuing to sit even for several days. The assembly adjudicates claims, inflicts penalties, ejects or readmits members of the tribe as decided. A member failing to attend the Kulam, as the assembly is called, loses his tribe membership. Omens are resorted to for decisions, when the assembly fails to agree. Some of them are most simple. For instance, an equal quantity of rice is placed in two pots of equal weight, filled with an equal amount of water and provided with equal fuel. The man whose rice boils first wins the case. There is an unusual method of solving a money dispute. The amount claimed is placed by the side of an idol, and the claimant asked to take it. If nothing happens to him, he is given the amount.

The Korachas are great believers in omens in other matters too. One method of consultation is to sacrifice a fowl at a shrine, sit in front of it listening to the direction where the chirping of lizards originates from for the answer. They consider it a bad omen when one sees while stepping out: pots of milk, a man leading a bull or a bull bellowing. On the contrary, if a bull bellows at the site of any work, it is considered lucky. Number seven is ominous, and no expedition with seven should ever embark on a job. To one end of a broomstick, several small pieces are tied dipped in oil. If the stick floats in water, all is well, but if it stinks, it is bad.

Religion

Though the Korachas are animists, they worship Venkateswara of Tirupati with great devotion whom they call Thimappa and visit with great reverence. A curious custom connected with Thimappa is this: If a boy and girl have been living together and decide on marriage it must be performed before Thimappa to be accepted socially.

There are many female deities. A favourite spirit they worship is Munisvara to whom sacrifices are offered. Each of their settlement contains a special hut dedicated to one of their several deities. The ceremonial rites are their own, not borrowed from others. They perform in their own manner. They keep no fasts. They observe certain Hindu feasts such as Gauri Puja, Navaratri, etc. Saturday is dedicated to Thimappa which even the wandering Korachas observe by having a bath, and performing certain rites like visiting temples, etc.

Their presiding deity is Mutheir, goddess of sleep, whom they dread a great deal. The women worship her with elaboration, especially when they are in trouble so that the punishment they get is not severe.

Death

A strange custom about the funeral is that when the body is being carried to the burial ground it has to be placed on the ground midway, when the chief mourner goes round it three times from right to left, breaks a new pot standing by the head of the corpse, and throws cooked rice round about the bier. Thereupon, the carriers change sides and then the party proceeds. For several days food is offered at the grave. And after a month, a feast is celebrated. On auspicious days, ancestors are worshipped.

The tattooing done by the Koracha women is also treated as a ritual. After the work is done, the performer waves chillies and salt over the women she has tattooed, repeating these words: "By the help of (mentions some deity) let the evil eye cast be removed."

Like several other tribals driven to criminal pursuits, some of the Korachas also followed them. But with their temperament, they took it as a great sport, an exciting adventure, not a crime.

In their amazing ingenuity and incredible versatility, the Korachas certainly are outstanding. Given the sympathetic understanding and encouragement, they could have made rich and creative contributions with their many-sided talents to the national culture, instead of indulging in destructive and fruitless pursuits.

Chapter Two

Tribalism in India

18 The Kharias of Bihar and Orissa

The Kharias are spread out in two states in the Chota Nagpur area of Bihar and Orissa. They are divided into twelve goshtis or clans known as the Hill Kharias, Dhelki Kharias, Dudh Kharias, etc. Their pattern of living ceremonies is, however, in the main the same, with perhaps slight variations in details—for some live in remote forests, some on the mountains. They are noted as expert climbers.

Creation of the Earth

God Ponomosor created the earth, but the method of creation is not known. When the earth was created, it was first filled with plants and trees. Then Ponomosor fashioned two clay images, one each of man and woman, and placed both inside a hollow banyan tree. As the milky juice of the tree dropped into their mouths, the images became animated. When they grew up and came out of the tree, they began to dwell in the caves of the hills. They knew of no clothing and lived on wild fruits and roots. Soon, they were blessed with offsprings. In course of time, the race of man multiplied so much that there ensued a great scarcity of food.

Men prayed to Ponomosor to provide them with some other kind of food, since the land could not feed them. So Ponomosor sent a violent storm, which blew the leaves of trees high up in the air which

were then transformed into different kinds of birds, according to the various sizes of the leaves. Men began to kill the smaller birds for their food.

The bigger carnivorous birds were called Ravana or Kanhar, vulture, and lived on the smaller birds. The vultures multiplied, and thus, their food fell short. So they prayed again to Ponomosor for more food. In the meantime, Ponomosor was displeased with man for cutting down fruit-bearing trees. So he sent torrents of rain to destroy man through floods. Many men died by drowning. But a few clever persons covered themselves up with gungu (bauhinia vahlli) leaves and fled to the hilltops and survived. After eight days, water receded and gave men a respite. They began to live happily again, and the dead ones were eaten up by the vultures.

Once again, the sons of man displeased Ponomosor; and once more, the vultures prayed to God Ponomosor and told him how the human beings had escaped to the hilltops by covering themselves with gungus. Now Ponomosor sent a rain of fire to wipe off man from the face of the earth. It lasted for seven days and nights. All men died except a brother and a sister. They were saved by Sembhu Raja and Dakai Rani, spirits living underneath the earth, and holding sway over *jovis*, marshy places. The birds were not destroyed as they flew up in the sky and remained there as long as the destructive fire blazed.

Seeing the desolation, Ponomosor soon repented his action. He sent down his messenger-birds to find out if there was any human being still living. Under the leadership of Dhechua chowkidar, three birds, Kawa Bhandari, Kuhu Kotwar and Lipi Susari, went out in different directions in search of man.

All birds in the beginning were white. But during the search for man, the Dhechua sat on the Burat tree and became black; the Kuhu sat sometimes on the ground and on trees, and hence it, became brownish black; and as Lipi sat only on the ground, it became brown. These birds had to return every night to Ponomosor to give him an account of their day's work.

After fifteen days, it was found that only the Kawa was growing stouter every day, while the other birds were getting thinner. So Ponomosor suspected the kawa of negligence of duty, and asked the secret of its putting on fat every day. The kawa said, "I am not neglecting my duty, but I am not disheartened by repeated failures as the Dhechua and others are." The fact, however, was that the kawa came every day to eat the rinds of fruits thrown over the jovi by Dakai

Rani and Sembhu Raja, and was thus gaining weight. The *Kawa*, crow, realized that the truth could no longer be concealed, so he divulged it to Ponomosor. Ponomosor was greatly heartened and asked his bird-messengers to bring the human couple to him.

But Sembhu Raja and Dakai Rani refused to give them up. Ponomosor himself came down to the Raja and Rani and asked them for the human pair. Dakai Rani said, "You created men and destroyed them by fire, but now when food (sacrificial food for Ponomosor) has fallen short, you seek men?" Ponomosor replied, "I shall not destroy men any more! Henceforth, you will get seven shares and I shall take only one share of mankind." The seven shares of Dakai Rani are the bodies of men, subject to all sorts of disease, and the one share of Ponomosor is the soul of man after death. This is the reason that as long as a man is alive, Ponomosor has no claim on him. On this promise, the two human beings were handed over to Ponomosor.

Origin of the Clan

A flood destroyed the Kharia land, but one old Kharia and his nine sons took shelter in a cave. They could not find food when they emerged, but finally the nine brothers bagged a deer and cut it into nine pieces and each took a piece for himself. But they had to find water. Each went in a different direction in search of it on the understanding that after finding it they would all assemble at the original place at a specified time. When they reassembled, it was realized that everyone of them had found water. It was decided then that they would all drink at one place at a time, but by turns. Surprisingly enough, as each returned from the pool, he related an entirely different experience, for each had seen a different animal or object: one saw a bird, one a fish, another a tortoise, a fourth salt, the fifth unhusked rice, the sixth a tiger, seventh a block of crystalline rock. They finally returned home to their father, and as each opened the scarf he had tied the piece of meat in, each one turned out to be different. The ones who had seen paddy and salt, found the same stuff on them. The old man when he heard their narrative, decided that each of his nine sons should adopt for his respective clan the name of the object he found in his scarf.

The Kharias, like some other tribals, have different types of relationship with one another. There is, for instance, the "laughing and joking" relationship. But these are permissible only between certain

relations. Besides this, there is also what is termed an "artificial" relationship established between two people entering into a ceremonial bond. Such relationship between women is named by a tree or a flower. When that flower blooms, they are inserted by them into each other's hair. Such bonds go a long way in bringing about integration in the community.

Social Ceremonials: Wedding

The main wedding ceremonies among the Hill, Dhelki and Dudh Kharias are the same. The Kharias do not regard any special day as auspicious, all days seem equally good to them. In fact, astrological factors do not seem to affect them. A special marriage booth called "marora" is erected for the ceremony. In this is a central post of timber plastered over with mud and cowdung, decorated with stringed mango leaves, leaf string passing round the four or eight posts encircling the entire marora, forming a kind of a big garland. The ritualistic marriage designs are drawn with rice flowers and red earth to form a square round the central post. The drawer of designs is a very special individual recompensed for his labours by rice and beer. Before the ceremony, the bride is anointed with the usual oil and turmeric powder, after which women lift the stool up with the bride on it, and dance round the marora seven times.

The main ceremony takes place in the bridegroom's house. The bride's party with music and dance is escorted by women up to the village boundary. They are ceremoniously received at the groom's village and anointed with oil. The respective in-laws embrace each other. There are two women in the party, each carrying an earthen benedictory jug of water, painted outside with designs with white rice flour, and decorated round its neck by wreaths made from ears of paddy. The mouth is covered with a hollow saucer with some pulse, and filled with oil to keep the wicks aflame as good omen. Also carried are twigs of mango leaves. In some villages, the bride's mother also carries a new bamboo basket with paddy and other grains along with the same sort of water jug with lamp.

Both the bride and groom sit beside on a palm mat. A member of the muru tribe has to part the groom's hair with one hand, holding a tuft of his long hair in the front to place it across his face and nose, and with the other holds a mango leaf curved in the form of a small cup with oil which he pours down the tuft of hair. This is to see

whether the oil flows in a straight line along the hair downwards or gets spilled or scattered. If the former happens, it augurs well, if not, the test is repeated as otherwise it would be a bad omen.

The next morning, the couple are carried in their wedding finery and are seated on a mat. Then the boy, selected as the groom's companion, takes the groom on his back and the bride's girl-companion does the same with her. They all dance seven times round the marora. When the two sit down, a whirling of swords and axes takes place outside to ward off evil spirits. A curry stone, a bundle of thatching grass and a yoke are arranged in a row on the marora touching each other, and the bride stands facing the rising sun over the stone, touching the grass with her heels, while the groom stands behind her facing east over the yoke, and touching the bride's heels with his toes. The water from the two ceremonial pitchers is sprinkled all round with shouts of "Hari Bol" in chorus.

The groom then lifts the bride off the straw, holding her by the waist, after which they go off with a party of young men and women to bathe in a pool or stream. At the pool, the boys bathe on the one side, while the girls on the other. A white cock is sacrificed on their return, which is meant to cleanse them of their past sins and accept the girl into the groom's family, and the two (couple) are blessed by the elders who advise them to live in love and peace.

Birth

As soon as a child is born, the midwife announces it by striking twice on a metal vessel, and men in the courtyard hearing this sound, strike the thatch of the rood twice with a stick. The former is supposed to prevent the child from becoming deaf.

The falling off of the navel string ends the period of pollution, and is observed by a general fast. On the day of purification, the mother and child are bathed in the courtyard, in water mixed with turmeric. All vessels are cleaned. The womenfolk rub oil on the baby's as well as the parents' head. The water, in which the bark of a tree is pounded, is sprinkled all over. Rice-beer is then served, the mother being given the first cup to "revive" her, as the saying goes, and a portion sprinkled all over the house. This purification ends all taboos. All adult members of the family observe a fast from a day earlier and come bringing gifts of rice, beer and other provisions. The baby, after being anointed, has a little of its hair clipped. A sacrifice is offered and a

drop of its blood collected in a cup along with turmeric, a coin and a leaf of a bael tree. Some of this is poured into the joined palms of the mother who sprinkles it before entering the house with the child. The officiating person, called mita, holds a mango leaf in the hand, and taking a rice grain and sesamum, drops them into the vessel and prays to god to bring the two pieces of grain together, taking the name of an ancestor, the grandfather's name in case of a boy and the grandmother's name in case of a girl. If these pieces of grain meet, the name which effects this is given to the baby. If not, other names of ancestors are tried out until the two sets of grain come together. Often two are given, the first one being kept a secret and the second given and made public in a ceremony, when the child is able to sit up.

The mita joins the baby's hands and feet together and washes them with rice-beer; dips his own finger into the beer and puts it into the baby's mouth; then ties round the baby's waist an unbleached cotton thread self-woven and sanctified by the sacrifice. The baby is picked up by turns by those present and given a present. With this money, the parents generally buy some fowls for the child to be set apart as the child's individual property. The mita then washes the baby's feet and throws the water from the cup over the roof and places the cup upside down. The ceremony then comes to an end with dancing, singing and feasting.

Death

When the corpse is being taken away, a little earth from the house and any kind of living thing, usually an insect, are carried on the bier. It is presumed that originally an animal used to be carried to keep the deceased company. Amongst the ceremonies after death, there is a very curious one known as Longoe Sun, "calling back the shade," usually performed either on the night following the burial or a little later. The woman and children of the family spread ashes or rice flour on the floor of the room assigned as the abode of the spirits of the deceased's ancestors, and leave the house. Only the adult male members participate in this ceremony. All mourners go towards the burial ground leaving just two members in the house. They carry four branches of a tree, an egg, an earthen pot whose mouth is covered by a leaf plate and an earthenware lamp. The party stops about a hundred yards short of the house, and there the rite "calling back the shade" is gone through as follows:

The earthen vessel is placed over a tripod of twigs. An elderly member of the family calls aloud to the spirit of the deceased: "O thou (here the name of the person is mentioned), come back to thy home quickly. It is going to rain. Where art thou? Art thou resting on some tree or in a ditch or in an anthill?" This is repeated until the flame in the lamp inclines in the direction of the deceased's house. A woman carrying this lamp throws the hem of her cloth forward, and folding it on her breast, turns towards the house, and a man breaks the pot and the egg. All of them return to the house in a procession, headed by a man beating one sickle against another. He is followed first by the man who broke the pot, next the woman, then those who had been the pall-bearers and then the rest, all walking in silence.

The head of the party knocks on the door and calls out: "Who is inside the room? Are you a demon?" The man inside replies "It is myself." The door is then opened, a lamp is lit and everybody looks for the marks of either a man, an animal, a beast, a bird or a reptile, on the ashes lying spread out. If any marks are noticed, it is assumed the shade has returned to the house. If no marks are visible, they believe the spirit has, for the time being, strayed away to some other place but will find its way back to the old home.

Dances

The Kharias are great dancers. They have a large variety of elaborate dances. Among their various self-expressions, dance with them is most vital, far more than rites or ceremonials.

Kharia youths of both sexes dance together. In a few dances, the dancers of the two sexes also divide themselves into separate rows; in some dances, old men and women dance together, though a few young persons may sometimes join them. In most dances, the drummers stand in front of the dancers a little apart. These are mostly young men who begin a song, and after they have sung a stanza, the dancers take it up and repeat it in chorus, while all dance to the tune of the song. Every season has for the Kharias its own appropriate songs and dances. Kharia dances may by divided into five classes known respectively as Hario, Kinbhar, Halka, Kudhing, and Jadhura.

The Hario Dance: In the months of Magh or Magho (January-February), generally boys and girls of both sexes dance this in the Jatras or at dancing meets held in different villages by turns; young men and women from a number of villages join these dances.

The dancers arrange themselves generally in columns, but now and then spread out in a line, each dancer placing his or her hands on the neck of the dancer next to him or her on either side. The steps are martial, the movements quick, and sometimes the dancers appear to be almost running. Sometimes they stand in a row in an erect posture, holding hands and dancing round in circles. Men play on the mandal drum.

The period from Phalgun to Baisakh (February to May) is the season for the Kinbhar dances, also known as angan or courtyard dances, in which the dancers, while singing, go round in a circle, but as soon as one stanza is sung, the circle of dancers moves forward singing in chorus: "Ho-re Hare," or "Hir-r-r-r ." As the dancers move forward, the drummers playing their drums with their faces towards the circle of dancers, recede backwards. The dancers, in their turn, retrace their steps with the drummers following them. While going back to their starting point, the dancers again dance in a circle. There is a stooping dance, in which even the drummers dance with a stoop. The steps of the dance are slow, one foot resting on the ground while the other is put forward or backward.

In one dance, the dancers stand in two rows, advance towards each other, and when they are within a few feet of each other, they stamp their feet vehemently on the ground and recede, dancing backwards and sometimes stooping while receding.

Halka Dance: In the Halka dances, both sexes dance together in an orderly arrangement. They divide themselves into two parties. Each sings by turn. The two parties move backward and forward in parallel lines, one facing the other. Each dancer in a line clasps with his or her right arm the left arm of the dancer next to him or her on the right, and with his or her left arm the right arm of the dancer next to him or her on the left. The hands thus joined together, from the palm to the elbow, are held a little forward. The Halka dance is done to the accompaniment of a song without any musical instruments. Each party then moves round in a circle with a slightly stooping posture. At the termination of a song or a stanza, the dancers of each party with a half-turn, spread out in a line, come to an abrupt halt. After a long jump and two short jumps, they take a high jump and vigorously stamp their feet down on the ground, and in a deafening chorus, give a lusty shout of "Hur-r-r" or Hir-r-r-r." Once again they form into lines, and with measured steps, dance or rather march forward, each party singing a song or stanza by turns.

In this dance, elderly people of both sexes dance along with younger people. The Halka dance-songs are classed as "Paru." Paru songs are also sung without a dance by young men and boys while sitting on the hills or meadows or while cattle grazing. The voice of the singer alternately rises high and falls low. Those sung from Baisakh and Jeth (middle of April to middle of June) are called Jethuari Paru, those from Aswin to Pous (middle of September to middle of January) are Kuari Paru.

Kudhing or Jatra Dances: The boys and girls dance together and place their hands on each other's neck, and advance and recede, some times in a straight line, one line behind the other, and sometimes in a semicircle or circle. The dancers also swing their legs forward and backward alternately, and then raise their right leg about a foot high. Mandal drums and Jhanj clappers are played by men for this dance.

In the Kasa Kudhing dances, men and women dance together, clasping each other's neck, and advancing and receding in measured steps in a stooping posture, the legs of all the dancers rising and falling together alternately. A few men play on the drum and stand facing the dancers, and advance and recede in unison with the dancers.

Another class of Kudhing dances are known as Indrail, and performed in the month of Kuar or Aswin (September-October). They are of three classes, known respectively as Tharhia, Lahsua and Rata. In these dances, only boys and girls, and young men and women dance. In Tharhia dance, all the dancers stand in a line and dance in an erect posture without stooping. In the Lahsua form, the dancers move to the tune of songs with slow measured steps in a stooping posture and sometimes almost sitting down. But when a stanza is finished, the dancers move with quick steps and come to an abrupt halt with a jump. In the Rata form, the dancers stand one behind the other, each holding with both his or her hands the upper arms of the dancer in front of him or her. They move in circles with quick steps, sometimes running or even jumping.

In the Doyor form of Halka dances, young people of both sexes dance together and form long lines, each dancer taking within his or her right arm the left arm of the dancer next to him or her on the right, and within his or her left arm the right arm of the dancer on his or her left, and interlacing the fingers of the hands of the dancer on either side with his or her own fingers. The long rows of dancers move round in circles.

In the month of Kartik (October-November) called Bondai by the Kharias, the Indrail dance is performed by young men and women, and the Halka dance by old men and women. In Tharhia, Lahsua, and Doyor dances, dancers sometimes carry sticks in their hands or over their shoulders.

Jadhura Dances: In the Jadhura dances, either women alone or both sexes dance together clasping one another's arms. They advance and recede in measured steps in a low stooping posture. The legs of all the dancers alternately lift up and down in unison, the drummers, in the opposite row, also do the same; and while one row recedes, the other row also does the same. However, when there is only a row of dancers, then as the dancers advance the drummers recede, and vice versa.

The Kharias also appear to believe that their seasonal dances, by some mystic alchemy, stimulate the benevolent forces of nature to be able to gain plenty in crops and game. As we watch them perform their various dances, we may assume their various movements and postures and exclamations to be pantomimic representations intended to exert a beneficient magical influence on different agricultural operations and other seasonal activities of the tribe.

Songs

As their imperfect and halting language and comparatively scanty vocabulary generally fail to give satisfying expression to the depth of their emotions in songs alone, the Kharias seek the aid of rhythmic movements of the feet to supplement the words and lines of their songs, and thus, their songs are generally accompanied by dances. By the various steps, forward and backward, circular and lateral movements and pantomimic postures of their dances, and the various modulations of the singer's voice, the Kharias, like similar other tribes, seek to give expression to different types and degrees of emotion, and add to the meaning and force of their songs.

Indeed, it is through their songs and dances, even more perhaps than through their rites and ceremonies or other media, that the Kharias seek to satisfy the inner urge for revealing their soul. These give expression to their innermost feelings, their joys and sorrows, their natural affections and passions, their social emotions and ideals, and last but not the least, their appreciations, however crudely inadequate and inartistically expressed, of beauty in nature and in man.

Besides serving to relieve the emotional burden of the individual, the Kharia songs, sung in the presence of large gatherings of their tribal followers, further acquire the "relieving power of social expression" by awakening similar feelings and sentiments in the minds of the audience, and thus enhance the delight of both singers and listeners. To make up for the paucity of words in their vocabulary, to express the intensity of their emotions, they have recourse to such devices as the repetition of the same idea in identical or synonymous words, same lines and phrases, employment of poetic words and expressions, the use of certain expletives to add emphasis, the lengthening of vowel-sounds for the sake of euphony, and occasionally, the use of a loan-word from their Hindu neighbours.

As Kharia songs are not recited but only sung, their composers do not concern themselves with rhymes. But they are very rich in phrases and colourful in imagery.

The water-lily blossoms in small white flowers!
Those small white flowers, oh, my girl!
O Wind! Do not wring them!
O Wind! Do not break them!
Those small white flowers, oh, my girl!
In day-time they blossom, at night, they shrivel.
Those small white flowers, oh, my girl.

On the bank of you tank lo! Red-red flowers.
Gazing-gazing at them my heart burns with delight, ah!
Go, my little brother, go pluck and bring them.
Gazing-gazing my heart burns with delight, ah!

Peacock mine! Peacock mine! My Peacock, O!
O Peacock! How their feathers sweep the ground!
O Peacock! How to and fro thy tail doth wave!
Peacock mine! Peacock mine! My Peacock O!
O Peacock, say who my heart's trouble will relieve?
O Peacock, say who my heart's sorrow will allay?

The Herons, my boy, like kings are holding court,
Like kings are holding court!
On buffaloes' backs, like kings, they sit in state,
Like kings they sit in state!

Towards Horway and Jashpur, O Mother!
The lightening flashes, O the lightening flashes;
The lightening flashes; in driblets falls the rain
In torrents pours the rain.
O Mother! In driblets falls the rain
Neatly the tadpoles the seedling strew
The frogs sing songs in glee.
Neatly the herons the seedlings plant
The seedlings transplant!

With broken grains and husks of rice
Thee, my girl, I nursed,
Bright like Jila fish sparkling in streams,
Thou look'st, my girl!
Like *suri* (fish) glistening in the waters, dost thou look!
From where did men come down, those men come down?
Their cast-nets whirling-whirling they came.
They fished these out as a jile-fish in streams
They took thee away!

Like unto a parrot art thou, my soul!
Softly moving in thy earthly cage,
Gently moving in thy earthly cage
Some day thou, O soul, must go away
Though now thou movest gracefully in thy earthly cage,
Gently movest in thy eartly cage!
House and possession all thou shalt leave behind,
Though now thou movest softly in thy eartly cage,
Movest gently in thy gently cage.
So adore thy God and give the spirits sacrifices due;
God as Ruler Supreme revere, and to the spirits in submission bow.

FESTIVALS

Puja for honey gathering: This is a very special celebration of the Kharias as this is an important occupation of the Hill Kharias. There is danger in this occupation from the unusual steepness of the hill-sides, where the hives are found. There is also the risk of disappointment, as curiously enough, the bees sometimes make off with the honey, leaving the hive empty! Therefore, the favour of Pat, the

mountain spirit, has to be secured by the party by making offerings to that spirit, before they begin their honey-gathering. Offerings should consist of things such as oblations of water and a little honey as soon as the first comb is collected.

Giring Puja, sun-worship: "Hero" is the Kharia's name for the sun, and "giring" means its rays. Like many Munda tribes, the Kharias regard the sun as the visible symbol of the creator and molder of the universe. Generally, in Kharia prayers, this deity is addressed as "Giring-Lerang" or "Hero-Lerang," the "Sun-Moon," thus probably indicating that it is not the sun that is worshipped, but its rays and the light of the moon, being the most sublime and visible objects of power that the tribal mind knows and can think of. The tribal mind has instinctively (and not by any conscious process) fixed upon "Giring-Lerang" as the most suitable representation of the great deity who is the life and light of creation. Thus, every Kharia must, once in his lifetime, offer at least a white cock to "Bero Giring." Formerly, it is said, a white cock or a white goat or any other animal used to be offered to the sun god by every Kharia, at least once a year, but now, at least every three or five years. On an appointed day, either in the month of Ba-bid-bid (May-June) or in Ashar (June-July), early before sun rise, the Kharia who intends to perform it, goes with a few relatives to an open space on a flat rocky spot, chatan, to the east of the village. It is said that Bero sacrifices are always made before an ant-hill.

Barnda Puja: The special feature of the Barnda Puja is that it has to be performed in front of an ant-hill, *Bhunru*, to enable the evil spirit to enter the ant-hill and remain confined there so as not to be able to do any harm. A carved wooden pole, *Khunto*, represents Barnda. All the offerings to Barnda are made in the month of Baisakh (April-May). All the family members and relatives go to an ant-hill to the west of the village, taking new earthern cooking pots, rice, sal wood for fuel, rice-beer, the fowl or animal to be sacrificed and a pole carved with three grooves representing Barnda. The pole is inserted into the hollow of the ant-hill, and the head of the family places on its top some rice and, on top of it, a copper coin and a bit of turmeric over it. Then the officiant sits before the pole facing west, and places three small heaps of rice in front. He makes the sacrificial cock or animal and eats it while holding it in his hand. When he offers the sacrifice, its blood is made to drop over the pole into the ant-hill. While making the sacrifice, he recites the following prayer:

Look here! Thou art called little Barnda, great Barnda. I had promised to offer thee meat fried five times and cooked deliciously with spices ten times. So now I offer what I promised. Thou art doubly a god twice as powerful as other gods. Thou indeed art the Barnda of the Kharias.

The god of hunt is worshipped in Baisakh. God is also known as Bal-Bhagwaṅ, Thakar and Dharan.

Consecration or Marriage of Fruit-trees: The Kharia projects his own personality into a number of impersonal objects which appear to him to possess power, either beneficent or maleficent. Among such objects are fruit-trees, particularly those which bear edible and nourishing fruits. The fruits of trees that have not been ceremonially married or sanctified are eschewed by the orthodox Kharia owner of the trees, as they are likely to breed worms. And so until the marriage of the tree is solemnized, the owner or planter of the tree abstains from eating its fruit, though there is no bar on other members of the family, as also outsiders, doing so. Generally, the ceremony is celebrated after it begins to bear fruit, and in most cases along with the marriage of a member of the family of the tree owner. The human bride and bridegroom are conducted in procession to the tree along with all the guests. Each takes hold of one end of a long unbleached cotton thread and circumambulates the tree five or seven times, while the rest of the people dance, drums are played, plenty of rice-beer drunk on the occasion. This is more a "magical" rite than a religious ceremony. The object of the ceremony appears to be to induct into the tree the propitious "mana" or power associated by the Kharia with the bridegroom and the bride.

Sanctification of Musical Instruments: A Kharia also ascribes personality to his musical instruments, such as the mandri drum and the bansri or murli (flute). Before using an instrument, it is anointed with vermilion marks. This, it is said, protects the instrument from the evil eye. This too is a ceremony in the nature of "magic" by which the man's or mystic power, residing in the instrument is sought to be protected, and perhaps, strengthened and augmented.

As tribal art is linked to magic and religious propitiation, the drawings in different colours are ritually employed by the Kharias in religious propitiation, and carvings on wood made as symbols of the spirit Barnda and others. But neither religion nor magic would appear to be the only motive that prompted the art of the Kharias or

of other communities. The carvings made by the Kharias on their bamboo flutes and wooden combs, on the door-planks of their houses, and the floral and other designs embroidered by their womenfolk on their clothes appear to have been prompted by a desire to also beautify those objects, just as the tatoo marks of Kharia women appear to have been prompted by the desire to beautify their body.

Chapter Two

Tribalism in India

19 The Lodhas of West Bengal

The Lodhas are found concentrated mostly in the jungle tracts of west Midnapur, as also in smaller numbers in the neighbouring tracts. They are believed to be the descendents of a powerful tribe called Savaras which spread from the Ganga to the Godavari. Amongst the tales of Lord Jaganuath of Puri is found the mention of a Savara chief Vishvavasu who worshipped him as Neela Madhava in Nilachal in the Nilgiri forests of Orissa on the Mahanadi banks. Vishvavasu made this deity exclusively tribal.

There is a romantic tale about this deity. A king of Puri, reading of this in Bhavishya Purana, sent his minister, Vidyapati, to locate this god and instal him properly for worship. But Vishvavasu obstructed. To overcome this obstacle, the king devised a ruse. He expressed a desire to settle down there and marry Vishvavasu's daughter, Lalita, to which the latter agreed. Later, he broke his word and left with his wife for Puri carrying the deity with him. The Lodhas have long memories and they still continue to bear a grudge over this.

Some anthropologists suggest that the word Lodha is a corrupt form of Lubdhaka, a trapper. The Lodha clans are highly sensitive to totems. This belief is so strong that if one belonging to the chirka clan were to strike a *chirka alu*, a wild yam, that is one of the clan's totems, blood is said to ooze out of it. He has to then bow before it, purify his house for breaking the taboo by throwing away all earthen

vessels, bathe, don fresh clothes, in short, generally act as though he had injured an ancestor. Similarly, those whose totem is moon, go into pollution like mourning during the new moon period and throwing away earthen pots and other articles. Those of tiger totem fold their hands in salutation when they hear a tiger roar. The extreme case is that of the chaud, fish clan, who not only won't eat this fish, but won't even wear conch-shell bangles. Because they think there is a resemblance between the two.

Religion

Among the Lodha deities, Basumata is held in high esteem, for she gave shelter to the Lodhas. At the wedding, the groom takes his oath in her name, calling on her as a witness. But she has no anthromorphic form. No fast or any other ceremonial is observed in her honour. Dharmadevata is also not an embodied spirit and has no temples, shrines, or rituals, and can be invoked on all occasions. From his heavenly abode, he is said to observe all deeds of men and animals, and nothing escapes his watchful eyes. He can thus weigh all deeds to reward or mete out appropriate punishment. He is invoked at the start of any ceremonial or community dance by a simple prayer. Baram is the god of the woods and resides in groves. When forests are cleared, the groves are preserved with respect. He is taller than men, with long hair, a large moustache, eyes broad and open, rides a tiger or elephant and wields an axe. When a tiger's roar is heard, it means Baram has to be appeased. He is described with a trident in one hand and iron bangle in another, and appears in dreams to foretell the future. Clay elephants and horses are offered to him at the foot of the tree which is his abode, usually a flag is also hoisted on it. At some places, worship is offered with branches and even dust. The former is called Dala Baram (*Dala* means branch); the other aspect is Dhula Baram because of the use of *dhula*, dust. The Lodhas believe if this rite is not performed, they may lose their way in the forest.

There are goddesses like Chandi and Sitala whom they share with the Hindus. The Lodhas have elaborated Chandi considerably, adding many picturesque personalities to her like Joychandi, Duasini Chandi, Baram Chandi, Bhairabi Chandi, etc; One has three eyes, one being on the forehead, all glowing like fire another has innumerable eyes on the head; one carries a trident, another a javelin; one

rides a lion and another a tiger; and one has a very large nose ring. Chandi is described both as an old woman with grey hair and as a sweet little girl. She rules over animals and snakes. As all castes worship her, her shrine is always crowded with clay elephants.

The Lodhas also have a picture of a busy spirit world with a regular hierarchy, neatly classified and named according to their powers, like *ahar veer* (food hunter), *vara veer* (superior hero); *chotta veer* (inferior hero); *chalauta veer* (wandering hero); *hanasa veer* (snake heroine). We may also take a look at a few unusual ones. When a house is haunted by Kalipat Kundra, no child will be born in it. One Desai Kundra is said to feed on a man's heart, and has generally a red chicken offered to propitiate him. In extreme cases, a man offers drops of his own blood and is called janabali, sacrificing oneself. A much-dreaded one is Yagin who is supposed to retain the souls of those dying of an epidemic. Even meeting her might bring death. She changes her shapes all the time and is, therefore, a most perplexing threat.

Some spirits are described as gigantic in size, with axe-like moustache, while some are too small. Women dying in childbirth, *chirguni*, are supposed to be lonely and crave company, hence, they take possession of human beings. Spirits of dead children take on shapes of animal, and one should avoid being touched by them, especially pregnant women, lest the baby in the womb get injured. A cow dying in delivery becomes Gomua Bhut, and takes on the shape of a cat, goat or even a pumpkin. Those killed by tigers become Bagbhuts and are considered a danger to cows.

Quite different are the water spirits Janka or Jakshia with round bodies five to six cubits in girth, no arms or feet, but two wide eyes in the middle of the body having the power to harm by a mere gaze. They emerge out of the water only at the dead of night. They are taken as spirits of misers who died childless, and continue to guard their wealth stored in vessels lying at the bottom of the water. Tinkling sounds are heard by the waterside which the Lodhas believe are made by the spirits playing with silver coins.

Another type of water spirit is Kath or Mai, two to ten cubic feet long; it is dangerous and emerges during floods or torrential rain, and generally catches swimmers or fishing men by the legs to keep them guard the treasures under the water.

The Lodhas also believe in spirit-possessed men known as Shamans who are held in high esteem. They have to undergo an elaborate

and strict course of training before they start practising. Shamans are regarded as special favourites of certain deities, so they can control spirits. Some of the feats performed by these possessed are defined as astounding. Evidently, the person feels he is the veer, and gets subtly transformed into the character of that veer. The presentation of the snake heroine is almost uncanny, for she walks with hands erect like a snake, curving the fingers into the shape of a hood while hissing like a snake through the mouth.

A most unusual training conducted in this community is for snake-charmers. For the inauguration, a tulsi tree (Euphorbia Nerifolia) is planted and three vermilion circles made on a straight line, keeping space between the circles signifying the three deities: Basumata, Dharamdevta and Sitala. The classes are held two or three times a week after sunset. The trainees sit in a circle facing west. The preceptor draws a circle round them, gives each a broomstick to be held vertically on the ground. The preceptor then makes nine vermilion dots, after which the usual offerings are made in a winnowing fan to deities like Baram, Chandi, etc., invoking the ancient heroes. It is said that gradually the students begin to get possessed and show signs of distinct spirits, as the preceptor chants the invocations and appeals to the appropriate spirits. Gradually, they tremble and shake, and throw away the broomsticks. When the preceptor feels they can practice on their own, they are given permission. They are taught exorcism, extracting poison, curing snakebites and use of different charms.

Bandana-Cattle Worship

The worship of the cattle is highly popular with the Lodhas who make it an elaborate three day festival, done in three phases starting on Kartik new moon. The worship is offered to cattle as incarnations of Goddess Bhagavati, goddess of wealth. All-night vigil is kept by men preceding the first day, while women are engaged in preparing food and other things for the festival. Men sing and play their instruments, move from house to house, songs known as Jagan, waking songs, continue all night.

On the second day, the woman of the house has a bath, puts on a new sari, carries the cakes ceremoniously in a brass plate along with new grass to the cowshed and feeds the cows, unties them and prays: "You have come to the house of a poor man; let there be no harm

done by snakes or tigers. Eat heartily."

The tutelary deity of the cow is then worshipped to keep the village free from illness, and another ritual is promised to keep the animals protected. By dusk, the path to the cowshed is decorated with designs of white rice flour with grass on them for good omen. As the cows return home, their horns are polished with oil, bodies washed, their hoofs cleaned, vermilion put on their forehead; they are garlanded with flowers and fed on sweets.

The third day is devoted to sports and dancing. Sometimes, the bulls are also trained to trot to time with their hoofs as also dance to their rhythm. The young bulls are teased and irritated by young men, and a kind of mock bullfight is held by waving an animal skin furiously in their face, accompanied with a lot of drumming and noisy dancing. Special songs are sung on these occasions. Here are a few of them:

O brother, who hath made the tinkling bell out of the wood?
And this silken thread of deep green twigs?
O must I tether the cow and the calf with rope so strong?
Fitting the name of the grazier.

But perhaps, oh brother, you know just not
Who made this rope and sturdy peg;
And who, those two brothers beating drums
Let the cow in a dancing gate?

Yes I know it, god has made the rope and the peg;
And god Mahadeva has driven it in;
And Ram and Lakshman, two brothers,
Beat the drums and make the cow dance.

Oh brother thy parents are beyond the mighty Ganga
And thy brothers are across its narrow stream;
And the Bandana festival is high on the hills;
So at every home will be worshipped goddess Bhagavati.
Oh brother, I will bring my parents on horseback,
And bring my brother on the back of an elephant;
Also bring the Bandana Parab by beating of drums,
So that goddess Bhagavati might be worshipped at every home.

The Tusu festival, doll's wedding, is a light social performed by women, and celebrated with great eclat and singing of special Tusu songs. Here are a few:

O what strange flower hath woven thy cloth, what provideth thy meal?
And what flower lendeth lustre to a maiden's coiffeur,
And sustaineth creation, what flower divine?

O woven into apparel are the blossoms of cotton,
And the flowers of the paddy provide us with food;
And sesamum and mustard to the coiffeur splendour impart;
And marks of vermilion bear the world at large.

O Tusu, the month of Paush has come.
And the king will demand his tribute,
Now Tusu, you will have to meet his dues
By selling at least your ornaments.

Like two earthen pots hung on a single sling
Which clatter and fret,
A man who tends two wives
To bursting brawls his partners set.

The Lodhas have a number of Baramasi songs, largely the outcome of the flowering of the Vaishnava influence in Bengal between the 15th and 17th centuries. It is even suggested that Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's own personal impact may have also worked on them. For, while the wave may have subsided elsewhere, it seems to have got deeply embedded in a crevice of the Lodha's heart.

Extracts from a young bride's Baramasi:

O sweet dame when you first came at twelve full
So slim was thy loin and movements sweet;
An image of love divine, O charming dame, twelve uncrossed.
Pardon my extolment if it is gross.
O sweet dame, a couple of years have passed by now,
Since you wore the bridal dress—how strange it looked;
When thy delicate hands furrowed and fenced the land and
Sown Puis with grace and thy mild warning lot to chew its stumps.

To save my taste; all were sweet.
O charming dame twelve uncrossed, pardon my extolment if it is gross.
Barely it is the third year you look so wise.
How to spend you give advice. And remind me every now and then.
To scorn your counsel is no gain and contend that a lady won
By marriage is not one's flesh and bone; and they are all sweet words of caution.
O charming dame, twelve uncrossed, pardon my extolment if it is gross.

In Ashad the river is full to brim.
And lotuses dance on the surface of it,
If he were a fruit, I would pluck him home
With the ease with which we do it oft.
Alas at this hour he has left me, an innocent girl.
In Bhadra my eyes poured down in torrents all accumulated griefs.
Carrying me away on the surging waves,
Being as I am lovely dame, how could I remain here desolate and forlorn.
Alas at this hour he has left me, an innocent girl.

Radha's Baramasi

In Jaistha my beloved called me O beloved Radhika,
While our yacht spread its sails on the waters of the Jamuna;
And now in Kartik, everyone longs for the love of her beloved.
But Krishna has left me cruelly, how could I live here alone;
With beauty uncaressed and unrewarded.
Alas at this hour he has left me an innocent girl.

Social Events and Ceremonies: Marriage

While most of the marriage customs of the Lodhas are almost similar to other tribals, a few are worth a mention. Before the main wedding ceremony, the village messenger from the groom's village is sent with a new earthen pot, five turmeric pieces, puffed sugar, a wooden bead necklace, a piece of red thread and some coins. These are received by the bride's mother in a new winnowing fan. This day is consi-

dered as auspicious, *mangal.*

The bride has to worship Dharmadevata, *god* of righteousness, for a happy union. This is done on the river-bank where all the ceremonial articles are kept spread on the sand. A maiden walks waist-deep into the water carrying a pot. A man does the same, then draws a triangle on the water with an arrow. Later, the bride dips herself before she wears the turmeric-dyed yellow marriage cloth. The pot dipped into the water is the *mangal ghat*, auspicious vessel.

In the courtyard, an altar is set up made from the earth dug up from around the sidha tree with a thatched roof overhead of sal and mahua trees. Every evening, maidens apply turmeric paste to the bride's body seven times, for she is not permitted a bath in this period. She is also not allowed to go out of the house to avoid accidents.

Another strange ceremony is Dhan Sarana, performed when the bride first comes to the groom's house. The couple has to sit beside a small heap of unhusked rice kept by the groom's sister. The bride has to move it to her side first, the groom then moves it to his side. This is done three times, and is supposed to be a symbol of the recognition of marriage. It is witnessed by all the relatives assembled. There is a ceremonial bath following it, made lively by the couple pelting balls at each other, called Kada Khela. There is also a symbolical ritual when the bride has to try to keep a brass pot steady filled with water, for this is said to indicate her forbearance and stability. In fact, it is even suggested that for this, the friends of nervous brides fill the bottom of the pot with sand to avoid the disaster of tilting.

There are several other tests the bride is subjected to. A subtle one is for the bride to remove the lid of the new pot in which the food is cooked the first night. She has to do it in her wet clothes after a bath without making a sound. This is to see if she will be able to steal food from the kitchen by stealthily removing the lid. It is called Hanri Khauki. *Hanri* means pot.

The two also indulge in some games, also a part of the ceremony. A favourite one is luko churi kheri. A pond is prepared and the couple made to stand in it. First, the bridegroom hides a nutcracker in a corner which the bride has to hunt and find. Then the groom has to search for the bride's *kajal pata*, the corelium box. Just before the main rites, a screen is held between the couple, and they are shown a number of colourful flowers, known as the "flower-showing ceremony." After the chief wedding ceremony, they are taken into a

room where the floor is covered with drawings of crowns, betel-nut cutters, corelium boxes and such other items made from rich paste by the village maidens.

An important person in a Lodha wedding is the village "messenger," so called because he summons meetings, gatherings, like panchayats, besides his role as a messenger in a marriage.

Index

Agarias, antiquity of, 95; festivals of, 106; iron-mongering of, 95-97; iron-smithy rites and taboos, 104-105; legends of, 97-103; myth of creation, 97-98; myth of origin of, 98-102; nomenclature of, 95; relationship with iron, 95-96, 103; reverence to fire, 105; septs (gotras) of, 103
Agricultural tools and implements, Bhils' worship of, 65
Andhra Pradesh, Chenchus of, 195-203
Arrow, symbolic importance of, 24-26
Art, 33, 38; of Savaras, 134, 137
Arunachal Pradesh, Khamti tribe of, 114-123; Sherdukpen tribe of, 107-114
Ashings, 34
Astronomy, Bhils' knowledge of, 72
Asurs, 96

Bahari Kari, rite of, 16
Bagh Agarias, 101-102; *See also* Agarias
Baigas, 39-40; attitude to sex, 19
Bamboo, significance for Bhils, 72
Ban Bati, rite of, 16
Basket-making, 35; *See also* crafts
Bastar rebellion, cause of, 48
Bhils, agricultural tools' worship by, 65; archery of, 71-72; childbirth rites, 73; deities of, 27-28, dramas of, 69-71; exploitation of, 79; festivals of, 65-66, dances of, 66-67; funerary rites of, 76-79; habitation of, 55, 80; history of, 55-57; knowledge of astronomy of, 72; manure worship of, 65; marriage and kinship ties, 71; marriage rites, 73-76; musical instruments of, 71; myth about forefinger of, 56-57; myths on origin of, 56; nomenclature of, 80; puranic references to, 56; relations with Rajputs, 57; rituals of, 62-63; songs of, 68-69; taboos of, 61; tree cult of, 63-65
Bhils pantheon, 57, 59-61
Bhuiyas, 39
Bihar, Santhals of, 178-194
Birhors, 25
Body-painting, 41-42
Bridges construction, ingenuity in, 41
Branded tribals, injustice done to, 50-52
Buddhist tribal communities, 52, 107-123; ethics of, 52; religious practices of, 8-10

Cane and bamboo work, 34-35; of Sherdukpens, 112; *See also* crafts
Chenchus; agility of, 198-199; Aripilla Ata dance of, 200; basket-

making by, 200; combs of, 200; crafts of, 199-200; dances of, 201-202; death rituals, 199; deities of, 196-197; dwellings of, 197-198; habitation of, 195; honey-gathering art of, 198-199; legend about drum. 201; legend of Chenchu lakshmi, 203; legend on origin of, 195-196; marriage customs of, 199; musical instruments of, 200-201; peacock dance of, 202; pre-Dravidian origin of. 196; religious beliefs of, 196-197; self-camouflaging by, 199
Ceremonies, for dead, 40; of Korachas, 267-268; of Lakhers, 238-240; of Lepchas, 216-217; mahaprasad engagement,12
Ceremonial purity, observance of, 18
Chakmas marriage sermons and advice among, 24
Coal, Agaria legend about, 105-106
Comb, symbolic importance of, 26
Cowrie Shells, uses of, 42
Crafts, aesthetics in, 33; design in, 34; features of, 32-38; of Gonds, 262-264; of Khamtis,118-120; of Lakhers, 228-234; of Lepchas, 222-223; of Nagas, 91; of Savaras, 132; of Sherdukpens, 112; of Todas, 211-212; specialized, 35-36; tales on, 34; tradition in, 36
Culture, definition of, 33

Damdyaras dance (Bhils), 67
Dances, Chherta. 39; features of, 30-32; of Bhils, 66-67; of Gaddies, 129; of Khamtis, 120; of Khasis, 155-157; of Murias, 39-40; of Nagas, 91; of Santhals, 186-188; Sherdukpens, 113-114; pus kolang, 39; relation to songs, 30; relation to word, 30; significance of, 30; song and music psychological impact of, 15
Death and morality, beliefs about, 6; Bhils' rites relating to, 76-79; Khasi rituals relating to, 152-154; Naga attitude to, 85; rites of Mahadev Kolis, 175-177; Toda rites relating to, 206-207
Deer, symbolic importance of, 24-26
Deities, 4; and godheads of Bhils, 27-28, 57-61; and godheads of Nagas, 85; of Gaddies, 127; of Khasis, 143-147; of Lakhers, 221-224, 238; of Mahadev kolis, 168, 174; of Sansis, 163; of Santhals,181-182, 188; of Todas, 208; supreme, attributes of, 7-8, 13
Dev Morga fair of Bhils, 58-59
Dialogue, formal preamble to, 21
Discipline, significance attached to, 18
Divination, methods of, 15-16; rites of, 15-16
Dormitories, 53; different nomenclatures for, 19; pivotal institution of, 19-20; of Khamtis, 117-118; of Sherdukpens, 110
Drama, of Bhils, 69-71
Dragging stone, Naga institution of, 90-91
Dress, of Gaddies, 125; of Nagas, 90; primitive, 41; of Sherdukpens, 111; of Todas, 205

Eklavya, Puranic myth of, 56; *See also* Bhils

Fables, 28
Face-painting, 41
Fairs of Bhils, 58-59
Family, individual roles in, 111
Fazal Abul, on Bhils, 57
Festivals, celebration of. 14; features of, 14; impact of, 15; of Agarias 106; of Bhils, 65-66; of Khamtis,

120-121; of Khasis, 156-157; of Mahadev kolis, 168, 171; of Nagas, 87-90; Santhals, 188, 191-194; significance of, 14; timing of, 14-15
Feuds, ending of, 13
Fire, Agaria legend about, 105
Flaura and fauna, Bhils knowledge of, 72; tribal intimacy with, 4
Flower friendships, tradition of, 12
Funerary pillars, 40-41
Forest Laws, injustice through, 51

Gaddies; agricultural life of, 125-126; dances of, 129; deities of, 127; dress of, 125; habitation of, 127; history of, 124-125; marriage rules of, 126-127; migration pattern of, 126; pastoral life of, 125; ritual friendship among, 126; songs of, 129; widows chitoren among, 126-127; witchcraft among, 128-129; worship and sacrifices among, 127-128
Games, of atoi-mal-maker sana, 45-46; of bobo, 45; of stilts, 46-47; significance of, 145
Garos, 2
Gond uprising, cause of, 48
Gonds, 24, 40, 44; art and crafts of, 262-264; broom dance, 244; culture of, 255-257; dance festival, 247-250; Dandari dances, 248-249; dialect of, 242; Durai festival, 255; festivals of, 250-262; folk song of, 28-29; history of, 241-242; joint family system, 262; Kaiser Kola dance, 244; marriage songs of, 261-262; Mohtur ceremony celebration, 252; origin of, 244-245; origin of the clan deities of, 257; Persa Pen celebration, 245-247, 257-258; picturesque festival, 255-256; religion and duties of, 245-247; rituals of 252; ritual eating of new grain, 254-255; Rota Pen worship, 247, 260; Samadi Kola dance, 248-249; Samber dance, 249; songs of, 241, 156; story of the birth of, 243-244; wedding ceremony of, 253; *See also* Maria Gonds
Gosai dance (Bhils), 67
Grihyasutras, codified guidelines of, 11
Grindstones, 41
Gujarat and Rajasthan, Bhil tribe of, 55-79

Hair, uses in, personal decoration, 43
Hair styles, 42; of Sherdukpens, 111-112
Handicrafts, 34-37; *See also* crafts
Hawks, use in hunting, 46
Headache, godhead of, 13
Headgears, decoration of, 42
Himachal Pradesh, Gaddi tribe of, 124-129
History and culture, interlinking of, 4-5; oral narratives on, 4-5
Ho uprising, cause of, 48
Holi dance (Bhils), 66-67
Hornbill, symbolic reverence for, 42

Iron pillar (near Kutab Minar, Delhi), astounding quality of, 95; *See also* Agarias
Indian steel, ancient exports of, 97
Indian tribes, occupations of, 2; percentage population of, 1; racial origin of, 1; self-identification of, 2

Jal sect, taboos for, 13
Jaratha, Puranic tale of, 56; *See also* Bhils
Jewellery and ornaments, 35; of Sherdukpens, 112-113
Jhum, cultivation alternative to, 49; tribal practice of, 2; tradition of, 48-49

Kachariyas, 2
Kadars, dances of, 31-32; dance orchestra of, 31
Kakayens, 2
Karnataka. Korachas of, 266-269
Kawaras, 24
Kerala, Kurichayas of, 138-141
Kewachi sect, taboos for, 13
Khamtis; bone carving of, 119; Buddhist tribal communities, 114-123; classes among, 117; crafts of, 118-120; culture of, 121-122; dramas of, 120; dress of, 118; designs of, 119-120; dormitories of, 117-118; economic life of, 116; festivals of, 120-121; graves of, 117; habitation of, 116; history of, 114-115; ivory work of, 119; land-ownership among, 116; masks of, 120; metal working craft of, 119; myth of creation, 114; nomenclature of, 115-116; racial origin of, 114-115; religious practice of, 121-122; weaving craft of, 118-119
Kharias, birth ceremony of, 274-275; death ceremony of, 275-276, creation of the earth, 270-272; origin of the clan of, 272-273; wedding ceremonies among, 273-274; dances of. 275-279; songs of, 279-280; festivals: Barnda Puja, 282-283; Giring Puja and sun worship of, 282; musical instruments of, 283-284; religion of, 286
Khasis, ancestor worship of, 144; birth ceremonies of, 151-152; dances of, 155-157; death rituals of, 152-154; deities of, 143-147; egg-breaking ceremony of, 145-146; games of, 158-159; houses of, 142-143; inheritance rights, 148-149; justice and punishment among, 150-151; Ka Shad Lymmoh dance of, 157; land ownership among, 149-150; legend about origin of, 149; matriarchal system of, 148-149; memorial stones of, 154-155; musical instruments of, 158; myth of creation, 143-144; Nongkrem dance of, 155-156; priests of, 147; religious beliefs of, 143; religious practices of, 143-147; worship and sacrifices by, 143-147
Kinship, among Bhils, 71; bond of, 10-12
Kols, feud-ending ceremony among, 14; insurrection cause of, 48
Koltas, 24
Konds, 39
Korachas/koravas/koramas, birth ceremony of, 267-268; faith in omens, 268; death ceremony, 269; origin of, 266-267; pot searing ceremony, 267; religious beliefs of, 269; social customs of, 266-267
Kuari loha (virgin iron), Agaria concept of, 103
Kurichyas; annual hunting day of, 140; birth rites of, 139; fight against the British, 141; habitation of, 138; history of. 138; religious practice of, 138-139; marriage ceremony of, 140; pollution consciousness of, 140-141

Laccadives, tribal population of, 1
Lakhers, as smokers, 230; bamboo matting by, 232; basketry making by, 230-232; birth-ceremony among, 238-240; crafts of, 228-229; customs attached to the distribution of kill, 234-235; deities of, 224-225; dress of, 225-227; hunting of, 234-238; ingenious traps for snaring and trapping birds and animals, 235-238; making knots with string

and rope, 233-234; ornaments of, 227-228; rituals of, 238; superstitution about tiger-killing, 235; tiger's killing ceremony, 235
Land tribal, concept of, 49
Language and movement, relationship between, 30
Legends, 4; of Agarias, 97-103, 105-106; of Khasis, 146-179; of Sansis, 160-161; of Savaras, 132; of Lepchas, 213
Lepchas, birth ceremony, 218-219; ceremonies of, 216-217; crafts of, 222-223; cultivation of, 214, 216; customs before launching the house construction, 216; history of, 214; houses of, 216; inhabitation of, 213; language of, 214; legends of, 213; marriage customs of, 218-222; musical instruments of, 223; myths of, 213; origin of, 213-214; religion of, 216-217; rituals of, 217-218; settlement of disputes, 216; tashi chene ceremony, performance of, 215-216; village composition of, 214-215
Liquor, exploitation through, 49; role of, 49
Lodhas, 51, 286-293; Bandana-cattle, worship by, 288-291; marriage ceremony among, 291-293
Love songs, of Bhils, 68

Madhya Pradesh, Agarias of, 95-106; Gonds of, 241-264
Mahadev Kolis; Akshagya Tritiya, festival of, 169-170; ancestor worship of, 169; Bahubij celebration, 171; Balipratipada celebration of, I71; birth rituals of, 172-173; Bodha performance by, 172; deities of, 168-174; Dhak (musical instrument) played by, 168; Diwali celebration of, 170-171; funeral rites of, 175-177; Gondhal celebration of 166; habitation of, 167; historical reference to, 167; marriage ceremonies of, 173-175; Navaratri celebration, 171; origin of, 167; Panchvavli ceremony of, 173; Pola celebration of, 170; Sankrant Kinkrant celebration, 171; sky legend of, 167; temples of, 168; Vaghbara festivals of, 16, 168-169
Mahaprasad engagement, ceremony relating to, 12; kinship bond through, 12
Maharashtra, Mahadev Kolis of, 167-177
Mandlas, 39
Manure worship, among Bhils, 65
Marabi sect, taboos for, 13
Maria Gonds, marriage sermons and advice among, 23-24; *See also* Gonds
Marriage, 14; among Bhils, 71, 73-76; among Gaddies, 126-127; among Gonds, 261-262; among Kurichyas, 140; among Lepchas, 218-222; among Mahadev Kolis, 173-175; among Santhals, 182, 185-186; among Sansis, 162-165; among Sherdukpens, 109; among Todas, 206; arrow as symbol in, 24-26; farewell rations aster, 23-24; negotiations for, 21-23, 28; rules of, 12; symbolic rites of, 19, 24-26
Masks, 39-40
Meghalaya, Khasis of, 142-159,
Metal casting, 35; *See also* crafts
Mikers, 2
Mimicry, fun of, 46
Mizoram, Lakhers of, 224-240
Modernization and tribal identity, 53-54
Mongloid, Indian tribes origin from, 1
Motar, symbolic importance of, 26
Munda uprising, cause of, 84

Mundas, 35
Murias, 39 ,47; romantic beliefs of, 4
Myths and dances, link between, 5; and rituals, link between, 5; characteristics of, 2, 5-6; definition of, 4; of Agarias, 97-103; of Bhils, 56-59; of Khamtis, 114; of Khasis, 143-149; of Nagas, 84-85; of Santhals, 178-180; tracing of origin through, 13

Nagaland, Naga tribe of, 80-94
Nagas; bamboo cups of, 92; basket dishes of, 92; burial practice of. 85; clan identification of, 81; crafts of, 91; dances of, 91; deities of, 85; drinking vessels of, 91; genna rituals of, 86-87; group cry of, 82; Khel (clan) feuds among, 82; morungs (bachelor-houses) of, 82-83; myth of creation, 84; myth on earthquake, 85; religious practices of, 85-86; Sekrengi genna festival of, 86-87; shields of, 93-94; songs of, 88-89; spears of, 92-93, stone dragging tradition of, 90-91; sub-groups of, 90; Thehrangi genna festival of, 87-90; travel gear of, 81-82; villages of, 81; weapons of, 81, 92-94; woodwork of, 91-92
Negrito race, Indian tribes origin from, 1
Nordic race, Indian tribes origin from, 1

Oran uprising, cause of, 48
Orissa, Kharias of, 270; Savaras of, 130-137

Palayans, 41
Paper-making, 35; *See also* crafts
Parayans, 41
Pradhans, 40
Personal decoration, 41-44
Poetry, lyrical characteristic of, 28; symbolism in, 29
Poker-work, 35; *See also* crafts
Pottery, 35; *See also* crafts
Priesthood, discipline for, 17; status of, 17
Proto-Austroloid race, Indian tribes origin from, 1
Prose, narrative characteristic of, 28
Punjab, Sansis of, 160-166

Raja Sanei town, establishment of, 161; *See also* Sansis
Rice-huskers, 41
Rituals, childbirth, 72; divination, 15-16; weather control, 16; marriage, 14, 24-26, 73-76; of Bhils, 61-63; of Gonds, 252; of Khasis, 152-154; Lepchas, 217-218; of Mahadev Kolis, 172-173; of Nagas, 85-87; of Savaras, 132; pre-natal, 26-27

Sansis, *badal* tradition of argument among, 161; binda ordeal for justice, 161; clans of, 160-161; deities of, 163; gue tapana practice of, 162; history of, 160-161; legends of, 160-161; marriage rites and ceremonies, 162-165; nomenclature of, 160; Panch Raas administration of, 161; Raas assembly of, 161; songs of, 164-165; sub-clans of, 161; unjustly branded as criminals, 166
Santhal revolt, cause of, 48
Santhals, 42; administrative system of, 183; Atur dance of, 187; Baha dance of, 188; Baha festival of, 188; Bahi Parab festival of, 193-194; Bonga deities of, 181-182; Caco Chatiar ceremony of, 184; Dabar dance of, 188; dances of, 186-188; Danta

dance of, 188; deities of, 181-182, 188; Don dance of, 187; Eroke Sima festival of, 191; festivals of, 191-194; habitation of, 178; hunter's dance of, 188; Hurkatara marriage, 186; Iri Gundli festival of, 191-192; Janthar festivals of, 192; Jatur dance of, 187; justice and punishment among, 183-184; kinship system of, 182-183; Kiring Janwane marriage, 186; Lagren dance of, 186; marriage by capture, 186; marriage ceremony of, 182; marriage customs of, 185-186; musical instruments of, 188-190; myth of creation, 178-180; Nir Bolok marriage, 186; religious beliefs of, 181-182; Ringa dance of, 187-188; ritual kinship among, 182-183; Soral festival of, 192-193; songs of, 186-187, 190-191, 194; tatooing among, 184; village of, 180-181; water festival of, 194
Savaras, 25; ceremonial ritual of, 132; comb's significance for, 132; crafts of, 132; elephant's symbolism for, 131-132; epic reference to, 130; habitation of, 130; history of, 130; *Ittalam* (wall-paintings) of, 134-137; legend on plough, 132; linguistic grouping of, 130; musical instruments of, 132-134; ornaments of, 130-131; paintings of, 134-137; peacock's significance for, 131; personal decoration of, 130-131
Sawaras, feud-ending ceremony among, 14
Sawang (Bhil drama), 69-71
Sculpture, 37
Sex, attitude to, 18-19.
Sherdukpens; administrative system, 110; class hierarchy among, 109; crafts of, 112; designs made by, 112; dances and pantomimes of, 113-114; dormitories of, 110; dress of, 111; habitation of, 108-109; hair styles of, 111-112; hamlets of, 108-109; history of origin of, 107-108; judicial system, 110; marriage among, 109; ornaments of, 112-113; personal decoration of, 112; relations with plains people, 108; religious practice of, 110-111
Sikkim, Lepchas of, 213-223
Sikkimese Bhutias, 214
Sin, tribal concept of, 52
Songs, characteristics of, 28-30; fixed intervals in, 29; of Bhils, 68-69; of Gaddies, 129; of Gonds, 241, 256; of love, 29-30; of Nagas, 88-89; of Sansis, 164-165; of Santhals, 186-187, 190-191, 194; of Todas, 210-211; on childbirth, 27; pre-natal, 26-27; rhythm in, 29
Stilts, tradition related to, 46-48
Supreme god, of Bhils, 57
Taboos, 13, 17-18; concept of, 52; of Korachas, 266; of Todas, 205
Tamasha (folk drama), of Mahadev Kolis, 171-172
Tamilnadu, Todas of, 204
Tangsas, 34
Tatobacha Math (Valmikis' hermitage) 167; *See also* Mahadev Kolis
Tattooing, and rank identification, 43; and status identification, 43; and sex attraction, 44; designs of, 44
Tawang monastery, 8
Tears, godhead of, 13
Tobacco, symbolic importance of, 26
Todas, 44; aversion to hunting, 205; bell-cow ceremony of, 208; dairy ceremony of, 211; death-

rites, 206-207; deities of, 208; devotion to buffalo, 205; dress of, 205; embroidery stitches, 211-212; habitation of, 204-205; huts of, 204-205; marriage customs of, 206; mystery of origin of, 204; physical features of, 204; place of pilgrimage of, 210; polyandry custom, 206; pre-natal rites, 206; religious beliefs of, 207-208; songs of, 210-211; staple diet of, 205; taboos of, 205; tribal-marriage custom of, 206
Totem poles, 39; *See also* Totemism
Totemism, practice of, 12-13; *See also* Totem poles
Toys, 35; *See also* crafts
Tree cult of Bhils, 63-65
Tribal administration of Sherdukpens, 110
Tribal culture, integrated nature of, 3-4, 6; understanding of, 5
Tribal economy, description of, 49-50
Tribal environment, 2
Tribal ethics, 52
Tribal exploitation, ways of, 49
Tribal indebtedness, rise in, 49.
Tribal identity, erosion of, 52-53
Tribal lands, alienation of, 49; grabbing of, 48
Tribal uprisings, cause of, 48
Tribe, definition of, 1

Uraons, marriage sermons and advice among, 24
Urbanisation and tribal isolation, 2

Weather-control, rites for, 16
Weaving, 34; among Khamtis, 118-119; among Sherdukpens, 112
West Bengal, Lodhas of, 286-293; Santhals of, 178-194
Women, ancient role of, 26; pre-natal care of, 26-27
Woodcarving, 35, 37-38; *See also* crafts
Woodwork, of Sherdukpens, 112
Worship and sacrifice, among Gaddies, 127-128; by Khasis, 143-147; practice of, 17-18

YSW

5.00

1771

KAMALADEVI CHATTOPADHYAY belongs to that remarkable generation which grew up with our freedom struggle. Beyond her impressive role in the national movement and her work in public causes is her wide understanding and appreciation of our heritage and culture.

Though in her early seventies now, she retains an extraordinary agility of body and alertness of mind. Kamaladevi's most notable contribution will be seen in crafts promotion, resuscitation and development. In this field, she has acquired an astonishing intimacy of the subject through her unique visits to the remotest and most forsaken places in India where crafts have been on the verge of extinction, but into which she has breathed life and given them a reprieve. Her present work is a product of these untiring efforts.

Author of several books on Indian handicrafts and culture, she is presently the Chairman, Sangeet Natak Akademi, New Delhi. She has been the recipient of the Magasaysay Award for unique services towards the cause of community development in India.

1V02C3101

ISBN 0 7069 0652 7

TRIBAL HERITAGE OF INDIA

Vol. I : Ethnicity, Identity and Interaction

Edited by *S. C. Dube*

"The book is a mine of valuable information, much of which is unknown to the common reader. For instance that at times the plainsmen treat the tribals as untouchables and, as in some pockets of Assam, the tribes are 'denied shelter or even a glass of water'. The origins of the various tribal groups and the legends associated with the tribe names have also been traced out thoroughly." —*Economic Times*

"A dazzling book with far-reaching implications. Organizations and post-graduate students could all profit through a study of this book, a book which bears a token of immense application and profound analysis: a book which they will enjoy as well. And much as a picture is worth a thousand words, the photographs incorporated into this volume are revealing as well as helpful." —*Hindu*

RETURN TO THE NAKED NAGAS

Christoph Von Fürer-Haimendorf

"Haimendorf's book reads more like a travelogue of absorbing interest than a dry-as-dust, run-of-the mill textbook on anthropology. The first part of the book gives a picture of the life of a Naga tribe in the early years of the century before they came under the influence of British administrators, American Baptist Missionaries and the greedy Indian traders from the plains. In the later part, he describes developments in contemporary Nagaland." —*Economic Times*

"It will be a reminder to the younger generation of the hard way to do anthropology. To the students of the contemporary scene it offers perspectives on the broad trends of change visible in Nagaland."

—*Indian Book Chronicle*

TIBETAN FRONTIER FAMILIES

Barbara Nimri Aziz

"This book makes delightful reading, is well written and bears witness to high scholarship." —*Indian Book Chronicle*

"Dr Aziz's volume is an anthropological study of the inhabitants of D'ing-ri, a Tibetan valley to the north of Mount Everest. The numerous case studies presented with remarkable clarity make interesting reading."

—*Statesman*

VIKAS PUBLISHING HOUSE PVT LTD